Downtown InFocus

TAKE ACTION!

2023

DRAFT DECEMBER 2023

Prepared for the
City of Fargo

Introduction

WHAT IS DOWNTOWN INFOCUS?

Downtown InFocus is a comprehensive, action-oriented guidebook for the future of Fargo's historic Downtown created in 2016 to guide Downtown planning and investment for the subsequent 10 years. Fargo's community members and local leaders were engaged throughout the planning process to help set clear expectations for how Downtown could (and should) change. The data analysis and research undertaken for Downtown through this process established a baseline from which the City of Fargo defined goals, and metrics to measure performance towards achieving those goals.

WHAT IS DOWNTOWN INFOCUS-*TAKE ACTION*?

Downtown InFocus - *Take Action* (2023) is an update and supplement to the 2016 plan. *It is not a rewrite of the original plan*. Every year the City of Fargo evolves and achieves goals set by the Downtown InFocus (2016) plan. Tracking the City's progress also reveals where efforts need more...*focus*. Downtown InFocus - *Take Action* (2023) provides implementation guidance and updates priorities to reflect the current moment in Fargo, and helps the City of Fargo carry momentum into the future.

WHAT IS OUR STUDY AREA?

The Downtown InFocus study area comprises 560 acres in the heart of Fargo. It includes all of the Business Improvements District (BID) and the Renaissance Zone and stretches from University Avenue to the Red River - roughly from Sanford Hospital to the southern edge of Island Park. This study area is larger than the traditional Downtown "core" to account for the fact that the connections between Downtown and the near neighborhoods are critically important to the future of Downtown. This boundary is consistent with the Downtown InFocus (2016) plan, visible as a dashed outline on the maps to the right.

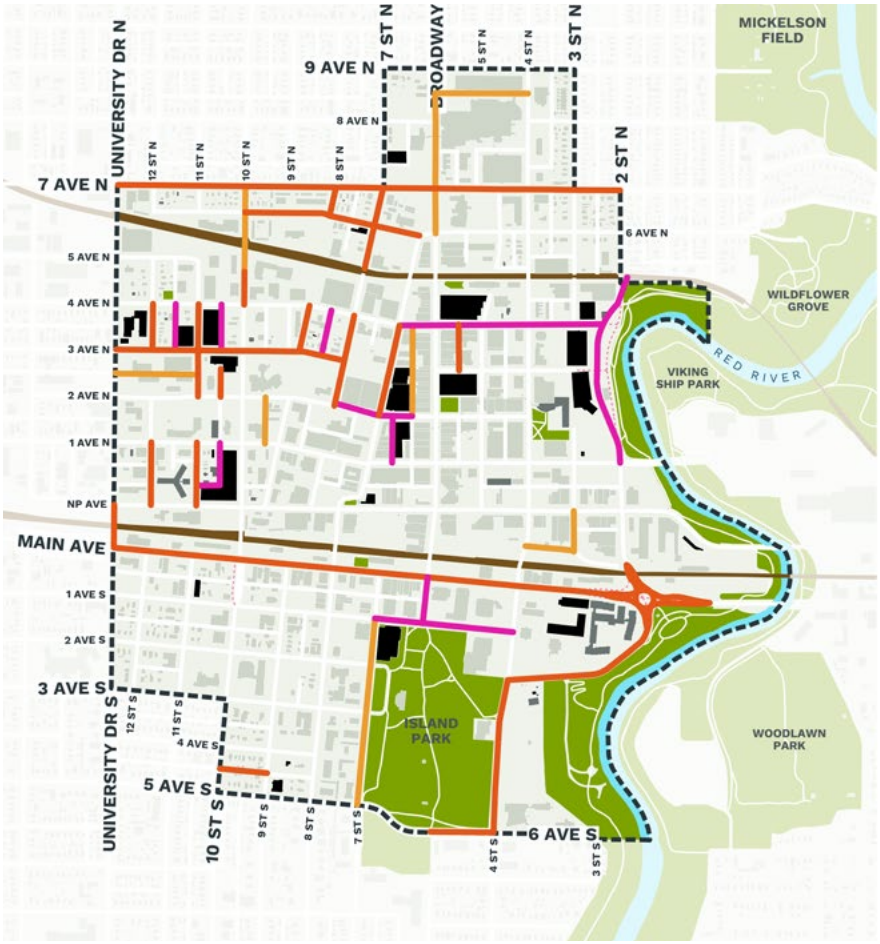
THE LAST FIVE YEARS OF PROGRESS

When compared to five years ago, Downtown today is visibly more vibrant, with more people in town on a daily basis, and more things to do. Programming efforts have amounted to over 9,000 volunteer hours. One of the favorite new additions to the Downtown scene is Broadway Square which draws visitors to approximately 270 events per year. The food scene is also booming; Downtown has welcomed many new restaurants, bars and venues.

The local economy is doing better, too, as Downtown remains the economic hub of the region. The County is seeing an increase in net business tax and real estate tax revenue from recent growth. The population of Downtown Fargo is 4,113 people [2020 Census]. This is a 6% increase from 2010. Since 2017, 798 housing units have been built or are currently under construction. This represents 13% of all the new units added in Fargo.

Downtown Fargo has changed a lot since the InFocus (2016) plan. Many of the sites that were marked as "underutilized" in the 2018 plan have been redeveloped and future development is planned for many of the surface level parking lots. However, there are still some large sites that have potential for development. Development on publicly-owned land can be leveraged to meet some of the InFocus goals discussed in this document.

The population of Downtown Fargo is 4,113 people [2020 Census]. This is a 6% increase from 2010. Comparatively, Downtown Fargo is growing at a slower rate than the rest of the City which grew 19.3% from 2010 to 2020. In addition, while Downtown is growing, it is at a slower rate than previously. Downtown added about 340 residents between 2000-2010, and about 235 from 2010-2020.



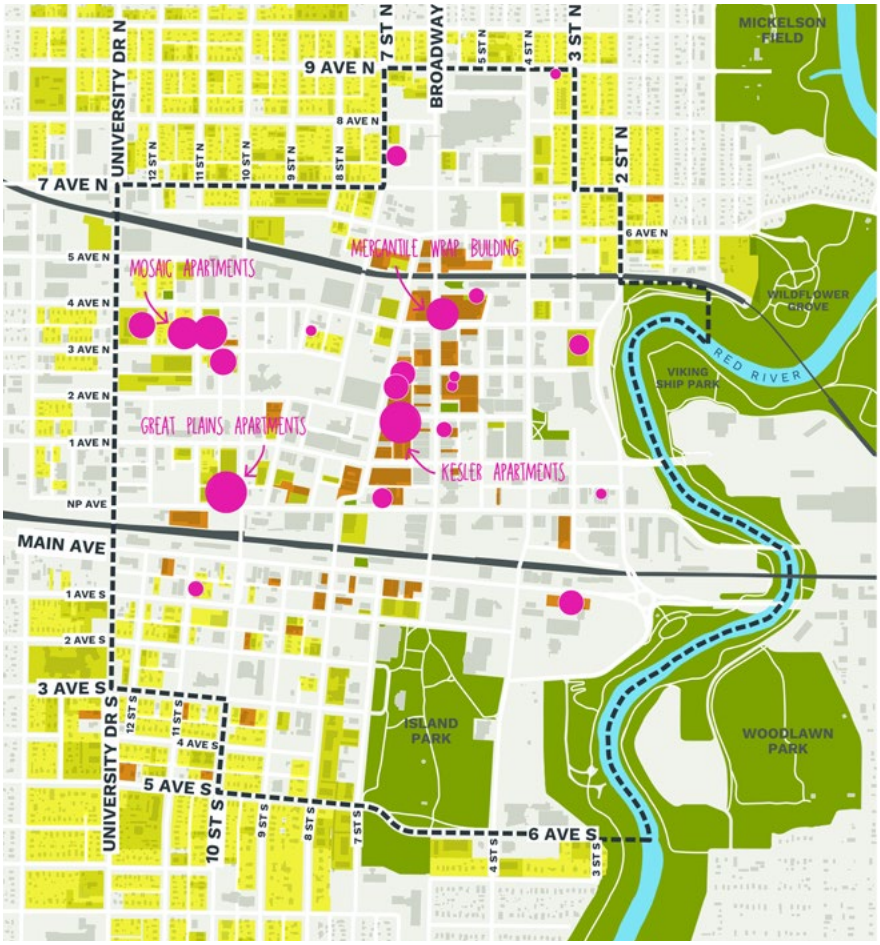
Change in Buildings and Roads

Source: Interface Studio, 2022

- NEW BUILDINGS SINCE 2018
- DEMOLISHED BUILDINGS
- NEW ROAD CONSTRUCTION
- ROAD RECONSTRUCTION
- ROAD IMPROVEMENTS
- DEMOLISHED ROADS
- RAIL
- OPEN SPACE
- DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREA

34,727 feet
of road improvements since 2018

There are 25 new buildings within the Downtown study area. Many of the new buildings are either multi-unit residential apartment buildings or mixed use residential with ground floor commercial retail. A total of $391,880,467 has been invested in Downtown construction since 2017.



Residential Units

Source: Interface Studio

NEW RESIDENTIAL UNITS

- 1 UNIT
- 2-14 UNITS
- 15-40 UNITS
- 41-84 UNITS
- 85-100 UNITS
- 101-152 UNITS
- RAIL
- OPEN SPACE
- DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREA

2022 LAND USE

- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- MIXED USE

There have been 798 housing units constructed or currently under construction since 2017. This represents 13% of all the new units added in Fargo.

There are several notable developments which have added a majority of these units to Downtown, such as the Kesler Apartments, Mercantile Wrap Building, Dillard Apartments, Great Plains Apartments, Mosaic Apartments, and Gateway North.

IDENTIFYING PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR OUR NEXT PHASE OF WORK

Downtown InFocus - *Take Action* (2023) is a supplement to the 2016 Plan. Each of the goals and recommendations were evaluated with the help of the City of Fargo Planning and Development staff. A report card documented progress toward each action and if the action remains a priority today. Categories included: "Complete", "In Progress", and "Needs Work". Each incomplete action was evaluated to identify the discernable barriers to implementation. **Lack of regularly allocated resources and a lack of clearly-defined champion(s)** were consistently cited for almost all incomplete actions.

Downtown InFocus (2016) contained over 85 actions nested under seven goal chapters:

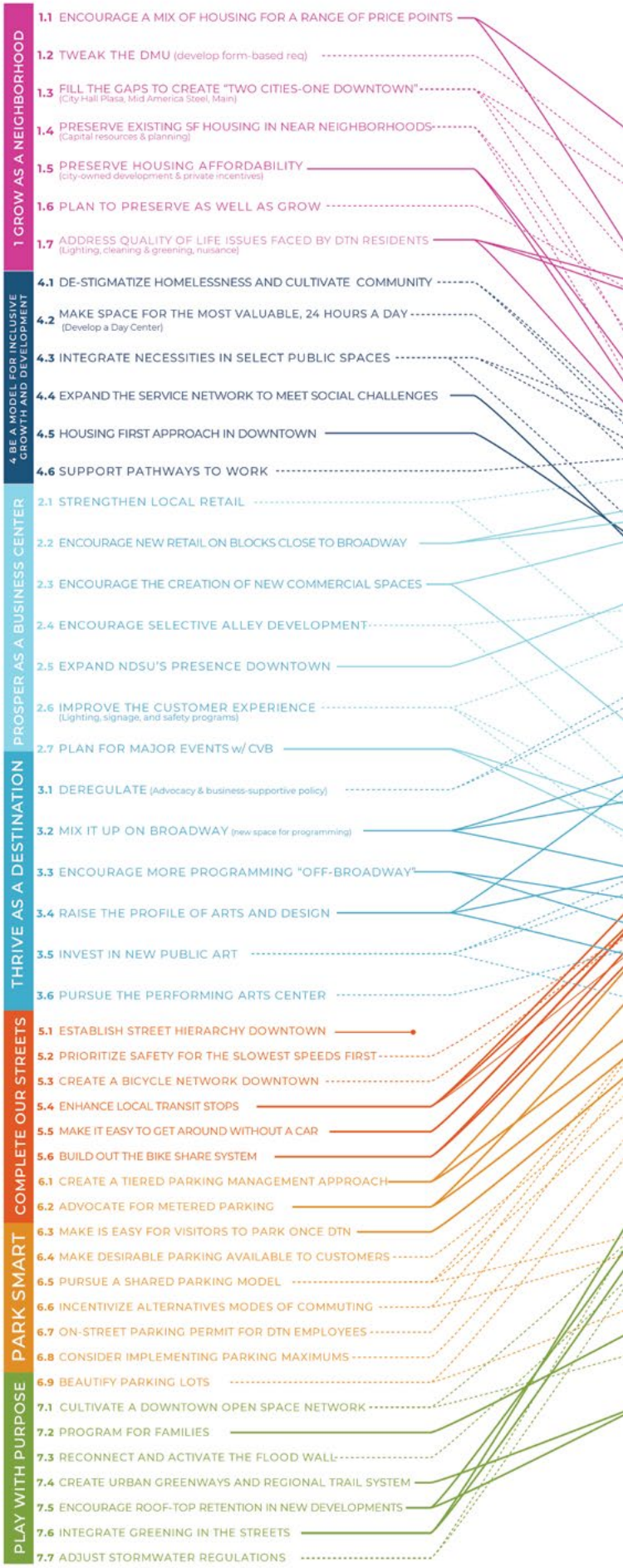
1. Grow as a Neighborhood
2. Prosper as a Business Center
3. Thrive as a Destination
4. Be a Model for Inclusive Growth & Development
5. Complete Our Streets
6. Park Smart
7. Play with Purpose

Although most of the actions remain relevant, this update is focused on taking action. Actions were grouped and restated based upon changes to funding, staffing, and/or circumstances of implementation that differ in Downtown Fargo today.

The intent of this document is to present a simple and specific set of 20 critical actions to move the needle toward improvements in Downtown that are most needed, today, and have made the least progress toward implementation over the last six years.

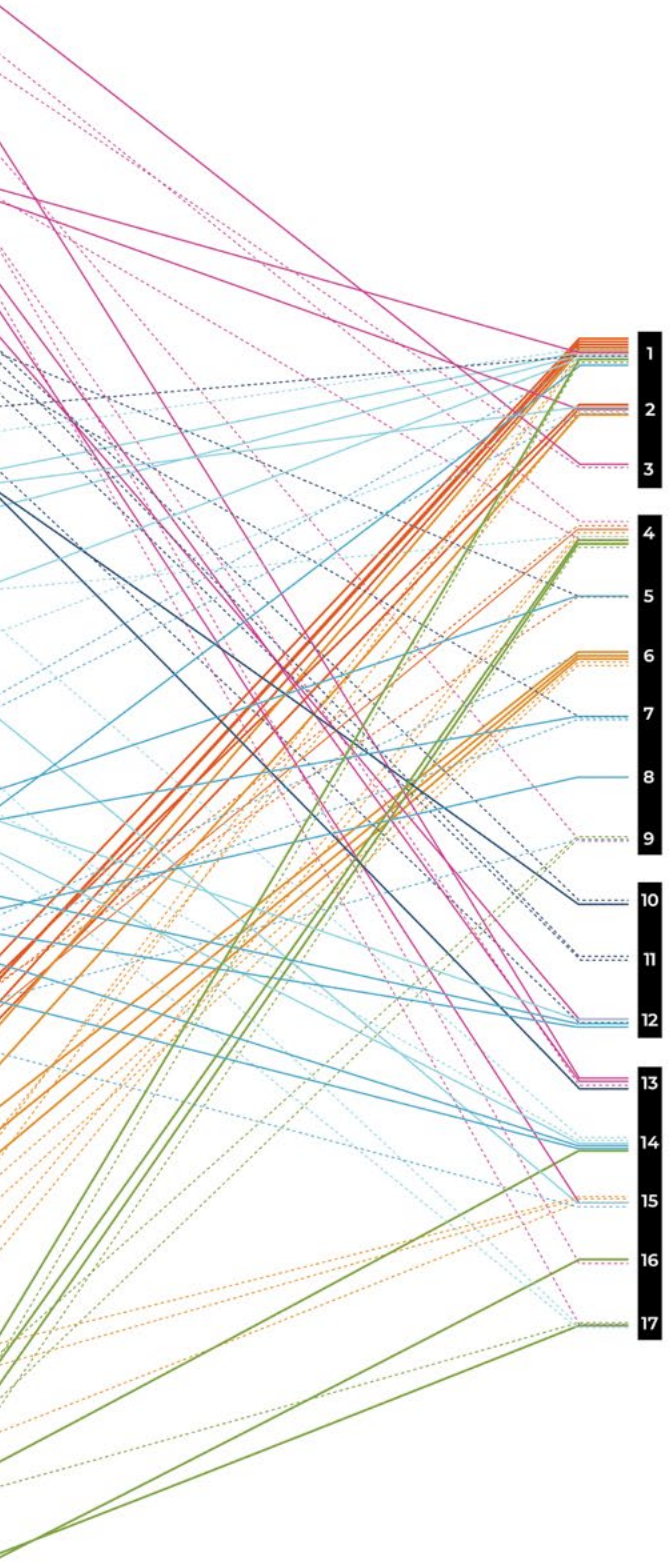
These recommendations are reorganized into four primary categories. The chapters that follow introduce each of these critical actions and define the implementation steps needed to move each forward. Each action is presented alongside a description of what "success" might look like and a brief explanation of where the City is "today", for context.

This document will serve as a living document to implement Downtown InFocus (2016). As things evolve and change Downtown, the document and it's implementation recommendations should be updated as well.



Downtown InFocus TAKE ACTION!

2023 UPDATE



Implementation
Roles

Public realm
+ design needs

Inclusive
growth

Public financing
+ economic needs

Implementation Roles

Public realm + design needs

Inclusive growth

Public financing + economic needs

Downtown InFocus 2023 UPDATE TAKE ACTION!

Implementation Roles

1. Clarify roles for managing downtown and implementation of the Downtown Plan.
2. Establish a dedicated City of Fargo Downtown Coordinator.
3. Quarterly coordination to advance strategic plans.
4. Monthly coordination for Downtown programming and events.

Public realm + design needs

5. Update the City's growth plan, zoning & land development code, to include design guidelines and form-based updates.
6. Develop a plan to upgrade Broadway.
7. Improve wayfinding and the visitor experience around Downtown parking.
8. Redesign 2nd Avenue.
9. Use the Public Art Masterplan to prioritize public art projects Downtown and reinforce the "Design District" concept.
10. Commit to the vision for the Downtown Riverfront.
11. Improve City Hall Plaza.

Inclusive Growth

12. Explore creating a separate Cass County / Fargo Continuum of Care.
13. Develop a 5-year strategy for sustaining the Downtown Engagement Center.
14. Build mixed-income housing downtown.
15. Invest in homes in the core neighborhoods.
16. Pursue permanent supportive housing solutions.

Public financing + economic needs

17. Increase City contribution to the DCP for programming and Downtown Plan implementation.
18. Review and refine incentive policies to better achieve public goals.
19. Redefine RFP process for publicly-owned land and identify terms to evaluate RFPs.
20. Define a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Downtown projects.

Implementation Roles

WHY THIS MATTERS:

- An in-depth review of the City's progress to implement the Downtown InFocus (2016) plan shows that although progress has been made, there is much yet to be accomplished. While the pandemic played a significant role in upending some of the progress, Downtown is also facing new and different challenges than even five years ago.
- This review also exposed the fact that implementation of plan recommendations was weakest where a clear champion or implementation lead was not clearly defined during the 2016 planning process. Many perceive the implementation of the Downtown plan to be primarily the responsibility of the City of Fargo Planning and Development staff, even though the plan is comprehensive and touches many different stakeholders.
- Similarly, Downtown activation and programming recommendations outlined in the plan - including those related to public spaces - are often seen as the sole responsibility of the Downtown Community Partnership (DCP) and the Downtown Business Improvement District teams.
- Downtown Fargo strategy development and implementation - physical and programmatic - are the responsibility of all, not solely the City's Planning and Development staff or the Downtown Community Partnership.
- Implementation of many actions requires a high level of coordination.
- Defined organizational roles ensure implementation is not dependent on individuals.
- Assigning roles ensures responsible parties can refine how and when to take action according to the reality of their office, resources, and capacity.

Successful downtowns are driven by a number of organizations and City representatives all working together to achieve shared outcomes. Establishing and sustaining these partnerships with clear roles for who takes action under what circumstances is fundamental to seeing further progress. **If Fargo wants to achieve the goals of the Downtown InFocus Plan, all stakeholders need to "buy in" to its implementation.**

Here's what we need to do ...

1 TAKE ACTION!

Clarify roles for managing Downtown and implementation of the Downtown Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Ensure that City staff share implementation responsibility for the Downtown Plan. Implementation champions for all actions are defined and the individuals leading each implementation action help to outline the appropriate steps needed to move each action forward. When issues arise in the Downtown area, there is collective clarity on which entity or entities are responsible and the best way to initiate a request for assistance.

Where are we now?

Implementation of Downtown InFocus is broadly seen as the responsibility of the City of Fargo Department of Planning & Development and the Downtown Community Partnership (DCP), though many decisions or actions fall within the scope of other stakeholders. The implementation strategy isn't institutionalized in operational procedures or staff onboarding.

Today, the Business Improvement District (BID) and the DCP are seen as interchangeable and responsible for mitigating many issues Downtown. However, many organizations including the Fargo Police Department, Fargo Park District, and private property owners all have critical roles to play.

- ☑ **STEP 1:**
  Gather key people together to confirm responsibilities and processes.
  Conduct a series of intensive workshops with stakeholders from across the City and external organizations working on behalf of Downtown to explore implementation steps needed to move critical actions forward.
- ☑ **STEP 2:**
  Outline common issues and complaints received about the Downtown area.
- ☐ **STEP 3:**
  Identify the appropriate chain-of-reaction to respond to common issues.
- ☐ **STEP 4:**
  Continue regular check-ins among key response chain.
  Meeting should include discussion of recent issue response to ensure the chain-of-reaction is working as it should.

WHERE DO I START?

IS THE ISSUE RELATED TO...

...a human?

If something illegal or makes you feel unsafe, regardless of the location, 911 Emergency should be your first call.

- Someone is sleeping someplace unsafe or strange.
- Someone is in my shop doing something bad.
- A person or business is playing amplified music outdoors after 10pm.

↓

Call 911
FARGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Fargo Police Department will mobilize the appropriate resources including non-emergency staff and homeless services.

...a physical nuisance?

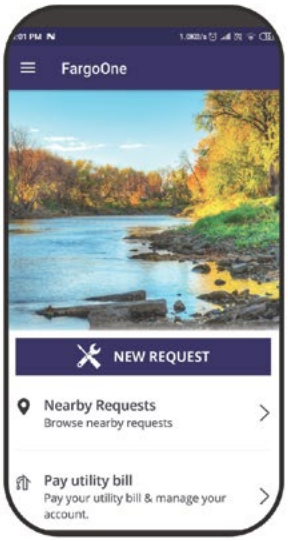
A physical nuisance may include:

- Garbage accumulation in a trash can is overflowing on the sidewalk.
- There's graffiti on a building wall.
- Slippery conditions or snow accumulation is blocking a public sidewalk.
- There's a large pothole in the street or alley.

↓

Submit issue through FargoOne App →

Issues or requests submitted through the app are either routed to the appropriate City of Fargo department or the Downtown BID.



THEN WHAT HAPPENS?

WHERE IS THE ISSUE OBSERVED OR TAKING PLACE?

Private property

Private property refers to a residential or commercial building or lot that is owned by anything other than the City.

THE CITY ALERTS THE PROPERTY OWNER

The property owner may be issues at citation if the issue is not resolved expediently.

Sidewalks

the surface + walkway

Once built, the responsibility of sidewalk maintenance, repair, and clearing transfers to the adjacent property owner.

the furniture + lighting

But, the furniture, fixtures, and lighting installed or placed by the City of Fargo (not including restaurant cafe seating) along pubic sidewalks, are maintained by the BID.

THE CITY HANDLES ISSUES IN THE STREET

within the paved street (curb-to-curb).

Public space + public property

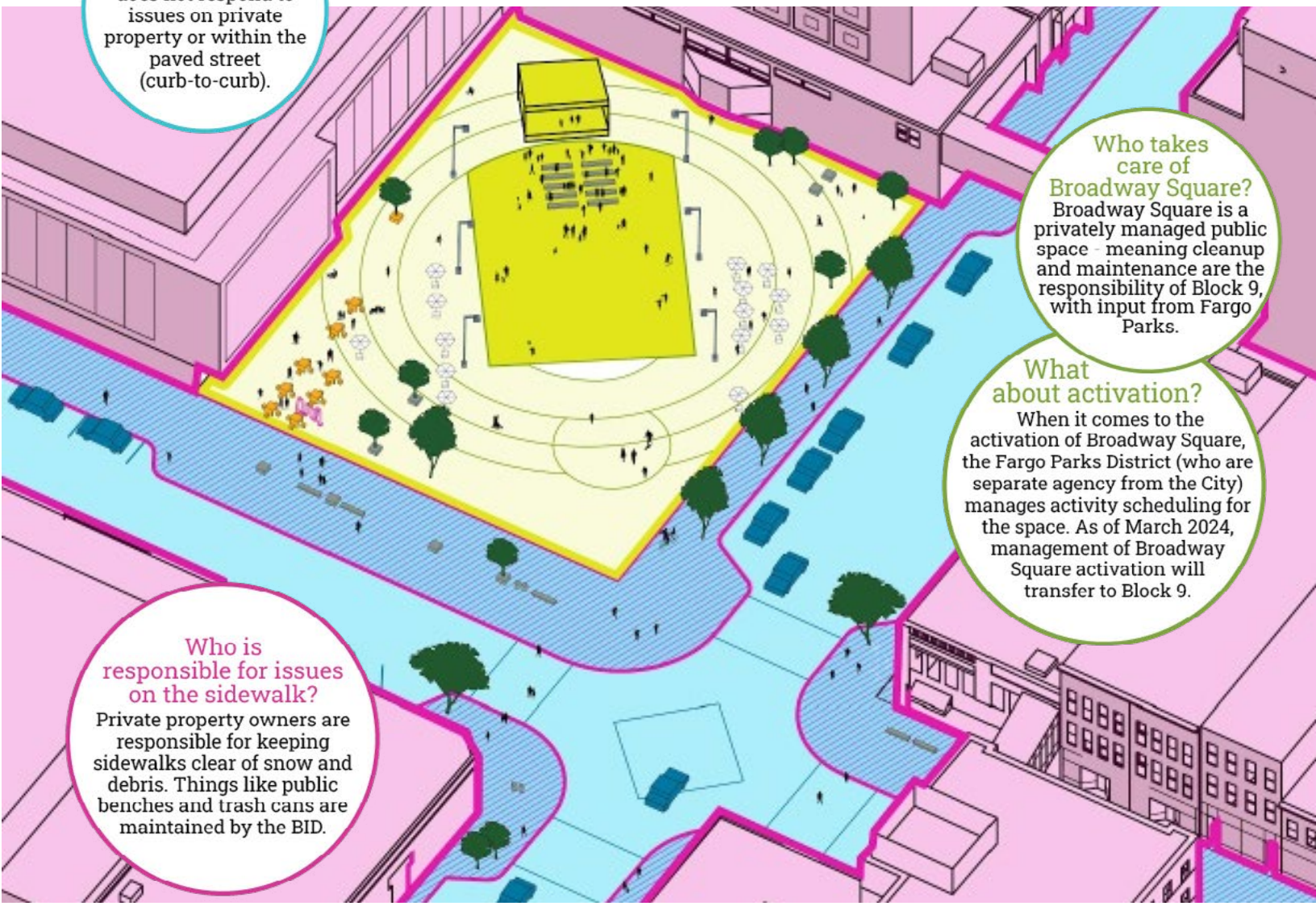
Includes publicly-owned parks and plazas, streets and alleys, and properties, buildings, or parking garages owned by the City of Fargo.

THE CITY HANDLES OR ALERTS THE BID

Issues are either routed to the appropriate City of Fargo department or the Downtown BID.

Did you know?

The Downtown BID does not respond to issues on private property or within the paved street (curb-to-curb).



Who takes care of Broadway Square?

Broadway Square is a privately managed public space - meaning cleanup and maintenance are the responsibility of Block 9, with input from Fargo Parks.

What about activation?

When it comes to the activation of Broadway Square, the Fargo Parks District (who are separate agency from the City) manages activity scheduling for the space. As of March 2024, management of Broadway Square activation will transfer to Block 9.

Who is responsible for issues on the sidewalk?

Private property owners are responsible for keeping sidewalks clear of snow and debris. Things like public benches and trash cans are maintained by the BID.

Who are the key players?

The City of Fargo Department of Planning and Development (PD), the Downtown Community Partnership (DCP), the Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA), and the Business Improvement District (BID) are major stewards of Downtown. City of Fargo staff and leadership at all levels have a critical role to play in the implementation of Downtown InFocus. Independent and nonprofit organizations also play key roles with respect to implementation actions related to programming or areas requiring special expertise, including homeless services and public events and programming. The chart below is to be evaluated and updated by completing the steps listed on Page 9 of this document. At the completion of Step 1: *Gather key people together to confirm responsibilities and processes*, all organizations should have a clear understanding of their role in Downtown and implementing the plan.

KEY IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

			City Commission	City Administration	Planning	Strategic Planning	Public safety	Engineering	Fargo Parks District	Public Health	DCP	Chamber	DNA	BID	Folkways	Arts & Culture	Housing Authority	FM Homeless Coalition	Medical Providers	State of ND
Implementation Roles																				
ACTION	1	Clarify roles for managing downtown and implementation of the Downtown Plan.	*This plan provides a start toward clarifying roles*																	
ACTION	2	Establish a dedicated City of Fargo Downtown Coordinator	X	X	X					X										
ACTION	3	Quarterly coordination to advance strategic plans		X						X	X		X	X						
ACTION	4	Monthly coordination for Downtown programming and events		X					X		X			X	X					
Public realm + design needs																				
ACTION	5	Update the City's growth plan, zoning & land development code, to include design guidelines and form based updates	X		X					X										
ACTION	6	Develop a plan to upgrade Broadway	X	X	X			X		X	X		X	X						
ACTION	7	Improve wayfinding & visitor experience around Downtown parking	X		X	X										X				
ACTION	8	Redesign 2nd Avenue	X					X			X									
ACTION	9	Use the Public Art Masterplan to prioritize public art projects Downtown and reinforce the "Design District" concept.	X		X											X				
ACTION	10	Commit to the vision for the Downtown Riverfront	X	X	X	X														
ACTION	11	Improve City Hall Plaza	X	X	X					X	X				X	X				
Inclusive Growth																				
ACTION	12	Explore creating a separate Cass County/Fargo Continuum of Care	X	X	X				X	X								X		X
ACTION	13	Develop a 5-year strategy for sustaining the Downtown Engagement Center	X	X	X		X			X	X							X	X	X
ACTION	14	Build mixed-income housing Downtown	X	X	X	X				X							X			
ACTION	15	Invest in homes in the core neighborhoods	X	X	X	X				X										
ACTION	16	Pursue permanent supportive housing solutions	X	X						X							X	X	X	X
Public financing + economic need																				
ACTION	17	Increase City contribution to the DCP for programming and Downtown Plan implementation	X	X							X									
ACTION	18	Review and refine incentive policies to better achieve public goals	X	X		X					X									
ACTION	19	Redefine RFP process for public owned land and evaluating RFPs	X	X	X	X					X									
ACTION	20	Define a Capital Improvement Program(CIP) for Downtown projects	X	X		X		X			X									

2

TAKE ACTION!

Establish a dedicated City of Fargo **Downtown Coordinator.**

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Establish a designated City staff person to aid in the implementation of Downtown InFocus, streamline communication with Downtown stakeholders, and assist the Downtown Community Partnership Executive Director with the coordination of strategy development and navigation of City Hall. The role of Downtown Coordinator is an executive-level position within the City.

Where are we now?

While Downtown InFocus *Take Action* (2023) was developed, the City of Fargo Auditor, Steve Sprague, had voluntarily assumed an informal role as the City's downtown liaison as part of the BID/DNA memorandum of understanding (MOU). The City Auditor also serves as the Downtown Task Force agenda keeper to convey pressing Downtown issues and needs.

☑ **STEP 1:**
Solicit support to **formalize a new Downtown Coordinator position** among the City and DCP.

☐ **STEP 2:**
Find the right person for the job.

Initially: Include in the responsibilities of the new Deputy City Administrator the role of Downtown Coordinator.

In the long term: Consider hiring a full-time employee to fill a new, formalized role as a Plan Implementation Coordinator to focus not only on Downtown issues and plan implementation but also to help coordinate and push implementation projects that require cross departmental coordination.

☐ **STEP 3:**
Get to work! Once established, the Downtown Coordinator should attend ongoing Downtown meetings and co-organize Downtown Task Force meetings with DCP Executive Director.

3

TAKE ACTION!

Establish quarterly coordination between DCP, DNA, and the City **to advance strategic initiatives**.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Conduct executive-level meetings at regular intervals to improve cross-agency awareness and updates on plan implementation and other bigger-picture initiatives.

These meetings will be in addition to the Downtown Task Force meetings, which serve to discuss day-to-day operations and issues in the Downtown. The City representative with Downtown Coordinator responsibility (see Action 2) will be included in both the ongoing Downtown Task Force meetings and the proposed strategic planning and implementation meetings.

Where are we now?

The Downtown Task Force - a meeting between City managers and DCP - meets routinely to discuss issues and needs. The purpose of the Downtown Task Force is for problem solving issues and brainstorming solutions. DCP and up to 16 different city departments are represented at these meetings. The meetings, however, do not generally include other agencies and are not the vehicle to coordinate multi-year strategies

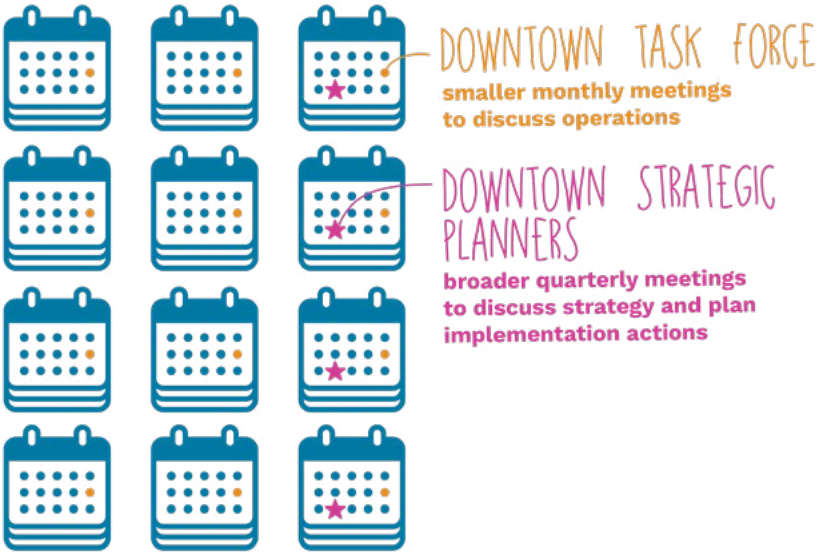
Larger cross-agency initiatives and implementation strategies are not central to the agenda of the Downtown Task Force meetings. A regular meeting focused on executive-level planning and the implementation of Actions presented in this Plan would benefit stewardship of Downtown Fargo.

STEP 1:
Engage the right people to participate.
Identify all City departments and external partners who need to be present for a discussion of strategic initiatives impacting Downtown.

STEP 2:
Identify a regular meeting schedule.
Hold each meeting to exchange updates on strategic initiatives.

STEP 3:
Meeting agendas established by the Downtown Coordinator with input from the key partner organizations.
Refer to Action 2.

How frequently should these groups meet? >>>



4

TAKE ACTION!

Monthly coordination for Downtown programming and events events among DCP, BID, Parks District, Folkways, Downtown Neighborhood Association and Downtown Coordinator.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Create new or existing programming that directly benefits local retailers and restaurants more regularly (outside of major or occasional events). Have a regular forum to coordinate and leverage events by different partners within Downtown Fargo.

Where are we now?

Coordination is often lacking between organizations working to host events or activate Downtown and/or Broadway Square, and there remains some confusion around who can close Broadway and for what event.

Today, the Downtown Community Partnership (DCP), the Fargo Park District ("Parks"), and Folkways (nonprofit) are the main entities providing programming and hosting events in Downtown Fargo. The permitting of events in public streets, requires coordination among Public Safety entities, Engineering, Public Works, and Planning. This process can be simplified and more user friendly.

What may be key responsibilities when coordinating programming for Downtown?

A Downtown programming coordinator is responsible for planning, organizing, and overseeing special events and programming initiatives in a downtown area. Their involvement should clarify and simply the process for any entity or organization wanting to hold events Downtown.

- Resource for Event Planning and Coordination Questions
- Promotion and Marketing Support
- Regulatory Compliance
- Coordinate with Public Safety

STEP 1:

Engage the right people to participate.

Identify all City departments and external partners who need to be present for a discussion of programming and events in the Downtown area.

STEP 2:

Identify a regular meeting schedule and include the Downtown Coordinator.

Once established, the City Coordinator will also play a pivotal role in facilitating programming and events.

STEP 3:

Establish DCP as the primary Downtown programming coordinator.

In this role, DCP also assumes responsibility to review requests to close Broadway Avenue for special events. Other responsabilities related to programming coordination should be determined in partnership with the City. In this role, DCP plays a pivotal role in enhancing the vitality and appeal of a downtown area through carefully planned and executed special events and programming. Their role is crucial in creating a vibrant and engaging atmosphere that attracts residents, visitors, and businesses to the downtown area.

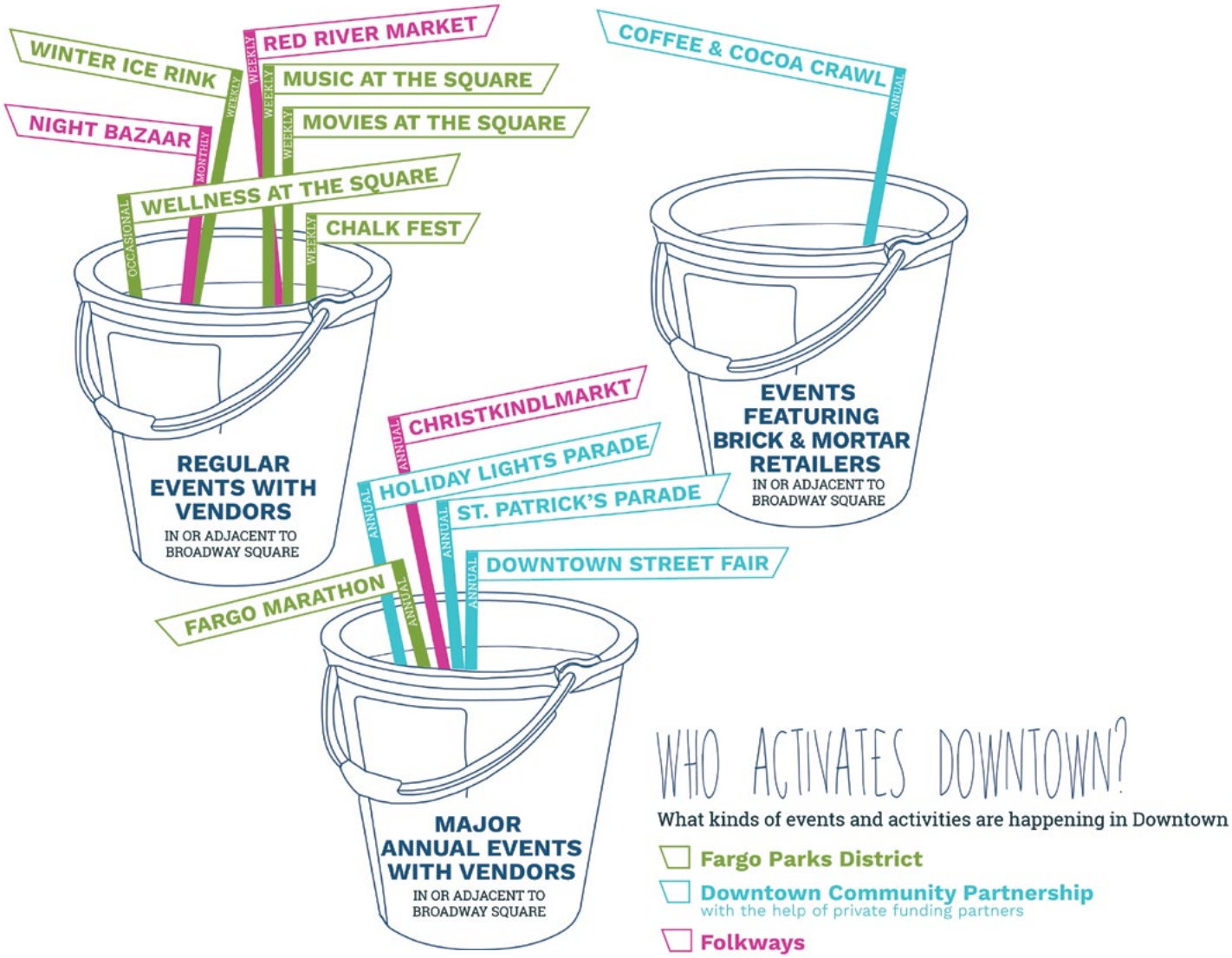
STEP 4:

Follow clear guidance for when it's appropriate to close down Broadway.

Criteria for the closure of this important street need to be clear and consistent. Create a decision tree to assess potential impacts on businesses, traffic, and anticipated construction season. The decision tree should be built around the following issues:

- Logistics - How much time does the street need to be closed for event set up and clean up in addition to the event itself?
- Expected attendance - What is the expected attendance?
- Timing - Will the event take place during the time of another event or soon after another major event?
- Scale - is the event looking to close all of Broadway or just one block?
- Audience - will the event potentially draw people that will further support Downtown businesses? Are immediately impacted business owners supportive of the event?

EXISTING EVENTS AND ACTIVATIONS DOWNTOWN



Balancing these factors will take some discussion. In principle, an event with a limited setup, draws a relatively large number of people at a time when there are no other events, is targeting a limited section of Broadway, and compliments nearby businesses is preferred over one with a smaller crowd, a longer closure time and potentially negative impacts on businesses. In keeping with recommendations in Downtown InFocus, look for opportunities to host events off-Broadway and limit closures to special events. Actions 8 and 11 in the document will work to improve and provide additional spaces to host events downtown on 2nd Ave and City Hall Plaza.

Ideally, the process for reviewing and approving a request to close Broadway, when appropriate, for an event includes:

- **Closure requests are evaluated by DCP based on established criteria and weighing the interests of local retailers and restaurants.**
- **If DCP supports the proposed closure, they will bring a request to the City.**
- **Permits are issued by Engineering Department for the event.**

What kinds of programming are missing?

Although many events draw foot traffic to Downtown, there are limited events specifically focused on retailer awareness or for the benefit of individual retailers or retail categories. Expanded programming Downtown should focus on supporting Downtown retailers and businesses where possible.

Public realm + design needs

WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Downtown Fargo is unique from other areas of Fargo and is expected to be a higher-quality place.
- Although a higher standard is expected, a discernible "standard" or "quality" of Downtown development and public spaces is not defined or codified.
- The private sector is the primary engine for new development and redevelopment in Downtown.
- Downtown Fargo is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district; no design standards are in place to protect its historic character.
- The City's ability to influence the look and feel of new development is limited. The primary quality control lever is the City's permit and/or zoning review, or with incentive review.
- "Walkability" is one of the characteristics of Downtown that is highly valued by the public.
- Walkable places require design sensitivity to the look and feel of public streets and sidewalks, as well as the design of buildings and storefronts that front the street.
- The physical fabric of Downtown Fargo is one of many elements that create the Downtown experience for residents and visitors.
- Real and perceived public safety issues have a major impact on the success of Downtown.
- Elevating the design and maintenance of public spaces will reinforce a sense of safety and improve the Downtown experience for residents and visitors. Elevated design elements include lighting, landscaping, trees, signage, and special treatments for signature streets like Broadway.

The experience of Downtown is central to the success of Downtown. Whether you live or visit Downtown Fargo, it needs to feel safe, welcoming, and inviting. Investing in design and programming is the most cost-effective way to boost economic development.

To ensure the highest quality development product and public spaces that Fargoans expect from their Downtown, the City must develop and codify design standards. To ensure Fargo is a welcoming place for all ages and abilities, investment in, and the design of, streets is critically important.

Here's what we need to do ...

5

TAKE ACTION!

Update the City's growth plan, zoning & land development code, to include **design guidelines** and **form-based updates.**

What are we trying to accomplish?

A new modern Zoning Code that incorporates the recommendations from the Growth Plan and Downtown InFocus, that clearly articulates a Future Land Use map for the City. These documents include form-based zoning updates, design guidelines for the Downtown Core, historic district considerations, street tree and landscaping mandates, signage regulations, and more flexible housing standards to allow for a mix of units and densities in Downtown and the Core Neighborhoods. The City of Fargo Engineering Department ("Engineering") has modified its street construction standards in alignment with recommended design guidance.

Where are we now?

A consultant was hired (Spring 2023) to develop a Citywide Growth Plan which will include a citywide Future Land Use map. Once completed, the Growth Plan will be the basis for a new Zoning Code.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- [ ] **STEP 1:**
  Complete the Citywide Growth Plan.

- [ ] **STEP 2:**
  Hire a consultant to draft a new Zoning Code.
  Include design guidelines, housing density, and form-based updates. *Note this process is often lengthy, expect five years to adopt a new Zoning Code.*

- [ ] **STEP 3:**
  Once the new Zoning code is adopted, **adjust the Zoning Map to apply the new code.**

- [ ] **STEP 4:**
  Modify street construction standards Downtown.
  Following the production of these critical policy documents, the City of Fargo Engineering Department ("Engineering") should modify street construction standards in alignment with recommended design guidance.

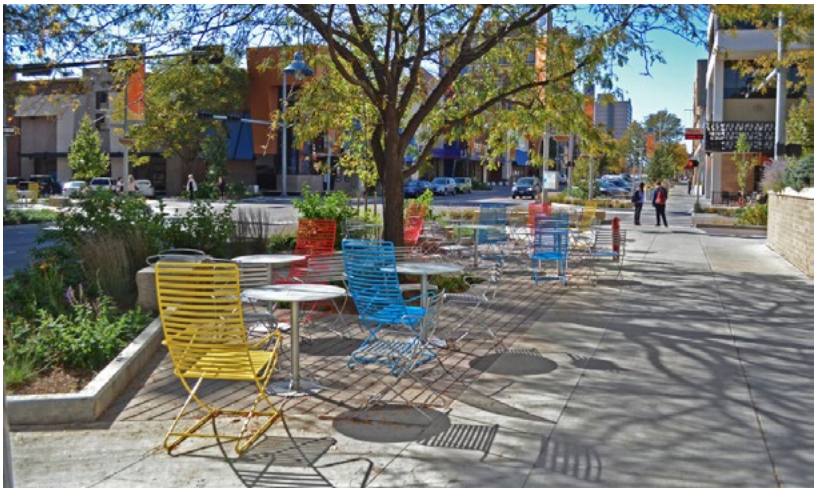
6 TAKE ACTION! Develop a plan to **upgrade Broadway.**

What are we trying to accomplish?

A clear vision and agreed-upon design of the future of Broadway, with a shared understanding that Broadway is a significant street that warrants a funding strategy that potentially departs from the typical allocation process. This future plan for Broadway includes guiding principles, improved sidewalks, paving details, sections, furniture, landscape design, and a proposed funding strategy.

Where are we now?

Broadway is the backbone of Downtown Fargo. It is beautifully maintained by the BID, but its design and infrastructure is aged. The bricks that were used in the last design are not easily replaced, and with recent development and levels of activity, the sidewalks are seen as narrow and crowded. Newly constructed parking garages provide relief for on-street parking, opening up the opportunity to explore on-street parking alternatives. The City is seeking State Department of Transportation (DOT) funds specifically for crosswalk and intersection improvements including ADA plates along Broadway. Any funding received provides an opportunity to study additional improvements to solve other design challenges and create a shared vision for the street.



What does extra sidewalk space do for Broadway?

Extra sidewalk width created by redesigning the streetscape can be used for additional public seating, larger trees and landscape, and artistic elements that will reinforce Broadway's role as the showpiece of Downtown Fargo.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

☑ **STEP 1:**
Secure the grant applied for by the City.

☐ **STEP 2:**
Hire a consultant to help design an engagement strategy for Broadway design improvements.

The City (Engineering and Planning Departments) executes an engagement process to involve the public in the potential options for potential intersection treatments. Included in these public forums are conversations about priorities for the future of Broadway, and should include:

- Alternative street sections that explore wider sidewalks and parallel parking alternatives
- Opportunities for programming, street activation, outdoor dining, store merchandising
- Maintenance considerations, including snow removal and storage
- Flexible/curbless streets and predetermined layouts to ensure the function and continuation of Downtown's largest event, Street Fair

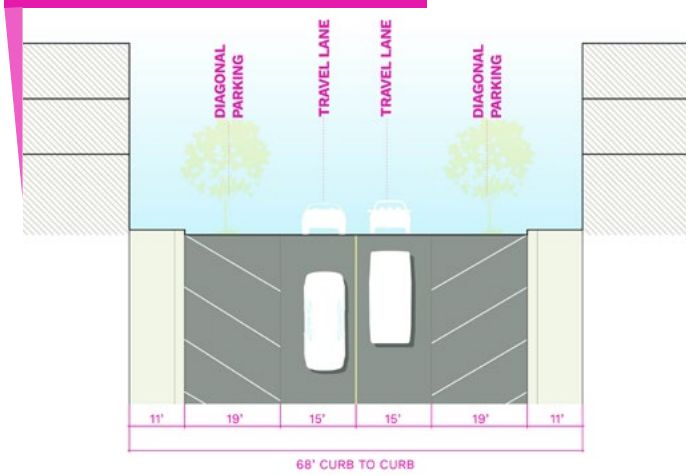
☐ **STEP 3:**
Review updated intersection design drawings with all involved stakeholders.

☐ **STEP 4:**
Pursue additional funding.
Review and apply for grant opportunities to fund a broader transformation of Broadway based on public input.

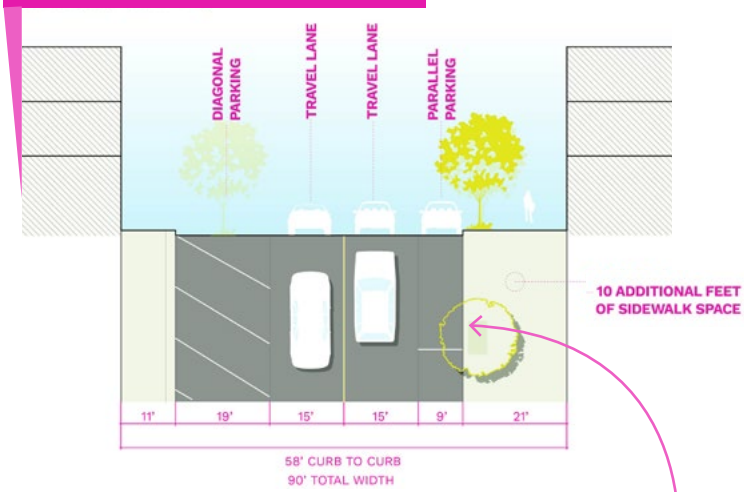
Broadways Avenue Streetscape

The graphic below depicts a redesign of Broadway Avenue wherein the north side of each block has converted diagonal parking to parallel, allowing for an expansion of sidewalk space along the retail frontage of the block. The section drawings at the bottom of this page illustrate the current and proposed conditions in section.

EXISTING BROADWAY SECTION



PROPOSED BROADWAY SECTION



One side is converted to parallel parking to make space to expand the sidewalk!

7

TAKE ACTION!

Improve wayfinding and the **visitor experience** around Downtown parking.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Wayfinding improvements and a thoughtful visitor experience strategy to make it quick, easy and intuitive to find available Downtown parking garages.

Over the long term, the City continues to implement a "park once" strategy to more effectively manage parking Downtown.

Where are we now?

Interstate Parking LLC currently manages Downtown parking and permits, including resident parking permits and contractor parking permits. New parking garages have been built, and the 2022 Downtown Parking study shows that sufficient parking exists to support typical parking demands Downtown. Despite the availability of garage parking spaces and targeted permitting strategy, "it's difficult to find parking" is a frequent complaint in the Downtown area, and structured parking garages are underutilized. Turnover of parked cars on Broadway and other downtown streets should remain a priority to support retailers.

STEP 1:

Update public-facing parking information.

Reach out to Interstate Parking LLC to ensure their website is up to date on all available public parking garages and how to best utilize them.

STEP 2:

Dedicate $50,000 to hiring a wayfinding consultant.

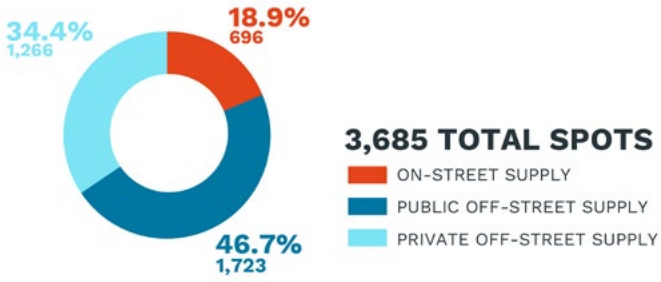
The consultant will conduct a locational and typological analysis and present high-level wayfinding recommendations to improve the legibility of the Downtown parking system. The proposed wayfinding strategy will help simplify preferred circulation routes and primary destinations and include recommended user-friendly terminology for all signage.

STEP 3:

Implement wayfinding improvements for Downtown parking signage and information.

PARKING DEMAND METRICS

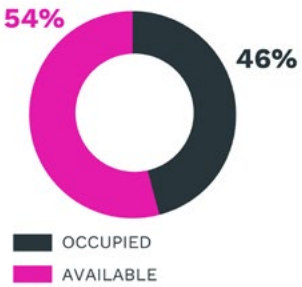
IN THE PARKING STUDY AREA...

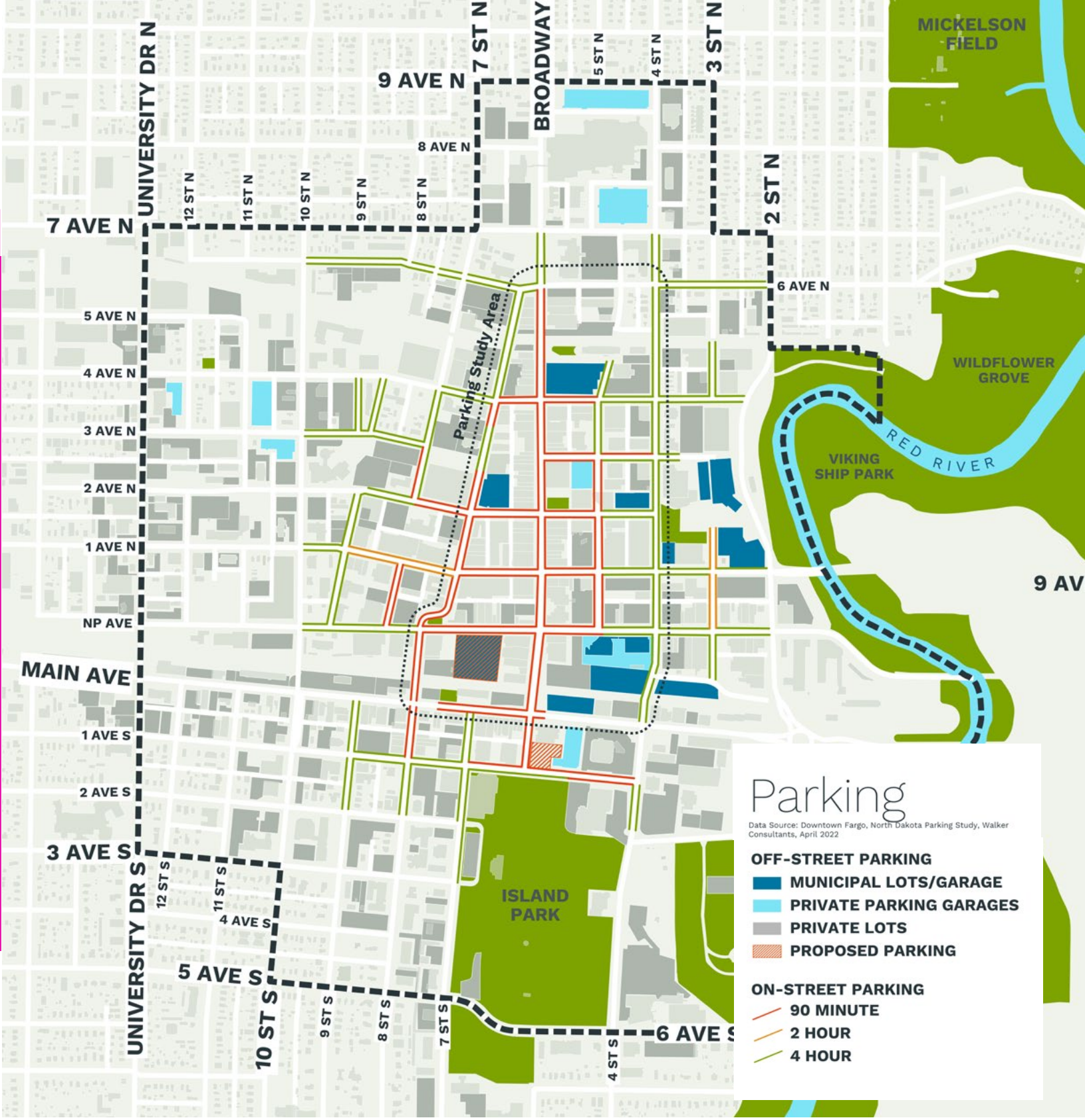


PARKING DEMAND COUNTS

Conducted on January 19, 2022, with favorable weather conditions

"Overall, at the peak hour 1,997 spaces were recorded vacant, indicating ample space availability."





Parking availability has improved!

Based on a parking study completed in 2022 by Walker Consultants for the City of Fargo, parking supply adequately supports demand within the central Parking Study Area, except for the sub-area (bounded by 8th St S, Broadway, 1st St N, and the BNSF Railroad north of Main Avenue) which is projected to experience a parking deficit. The proposed NP Avenue project site requires the greatest number of spaces to be built to replace existing supply and accommodate new users resulting from anticipated development projects.

8 TAKE ACTION! Redesign **2nd Avenue.**

What are we trying to accomplish?

A transformed 2nd Ave. N. between Broadway and 4th St N that creates a flexible curbless street that can serve as an extension of Broadway Square, with improvements to the beauty and function along the walk from Broadway Square to the Civic Plaza. 2nd Ave. N can be easily and safely shut down to accommodate programming and larger events alongside Broadway Square.

Where are we now?

Since its completion in 2020, Broadway Square is seen as a successful public space, so much so that folks think it could be larger to accommodate larger events. Broadway Ave is an iconic street that hosts many events, but balancing the number and scale of events is critical, especially to minimize impact on existing nearby businesses.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

STEP 1:

Update the Downtown Infocus Streets Playbook to reflect intended design for 2nd Ave N from Broadway N to 4th St N to meet the following principles:

1. Adjust the grade of the street to create a curbless street which easily allows for an expansion of Broadway Square when appropriate
2. Consider mechanical bollards or other safety measures to close the street when needed
3. Consider mitigation of the impacts to the perpendicular alley
4. Consider utility and infrastructure needs to benefit vendors and local businesses

STEP 2:

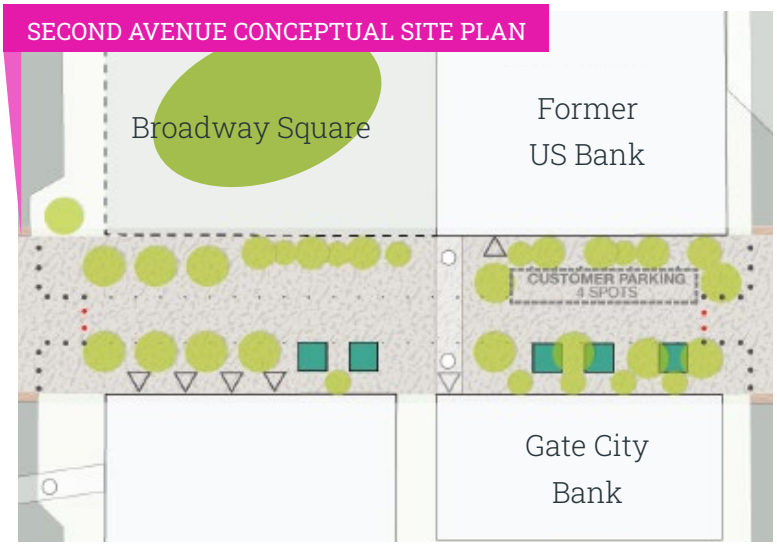
Coordinate with City of Fargo Engineering to finalize the design for a raised street on 2nd Avenue from Broadway to 5th St N.

Continue streetscape enhancements along 2nd Ave.

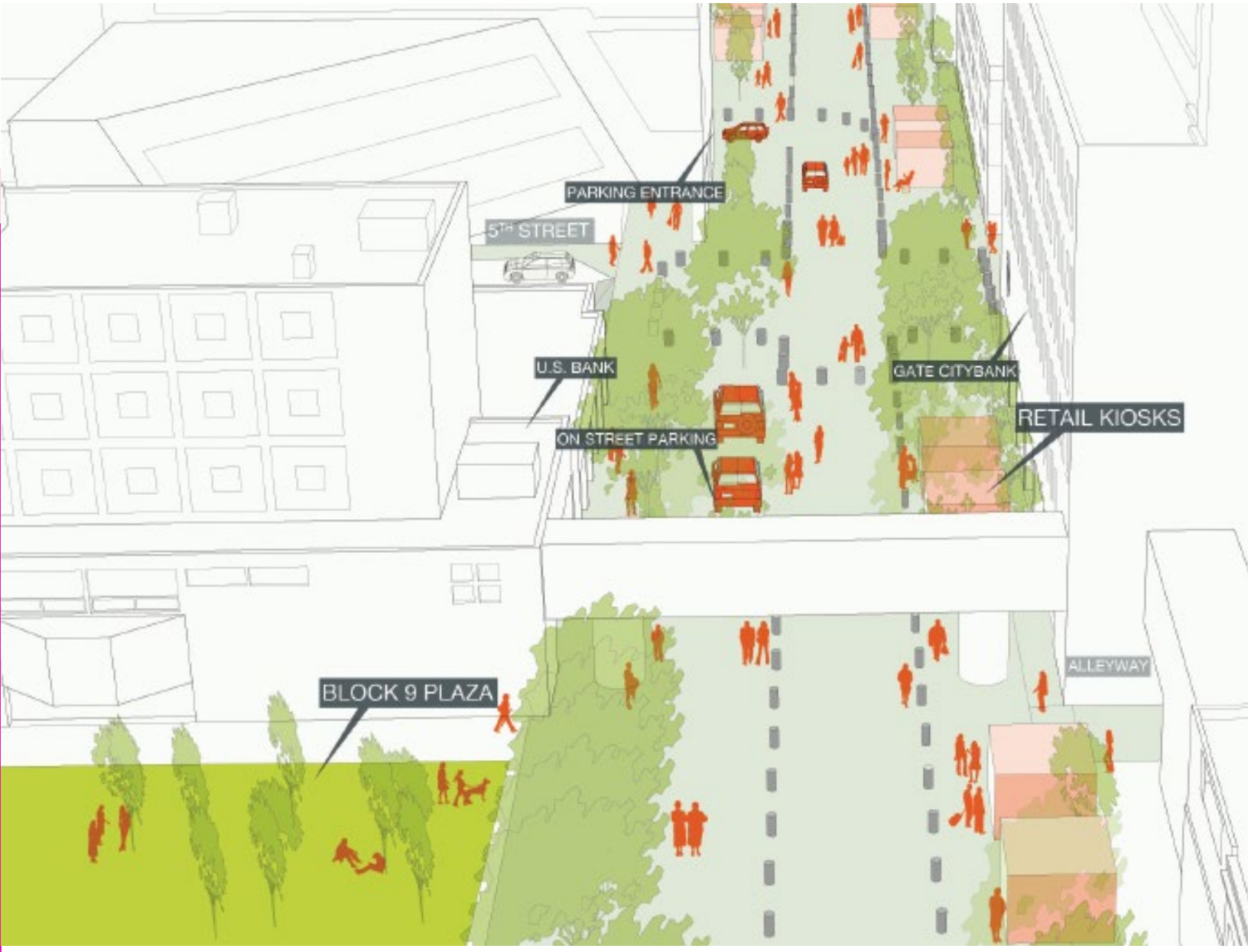
STEP 3:

Develop a timeline to secure funding.

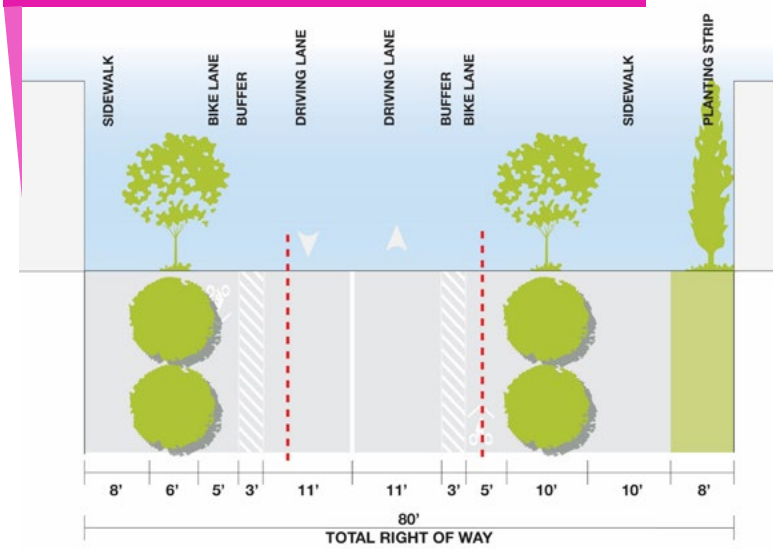
SECOND AVENUE CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN



Left: Conceptual plan for a raised 2nd Ave N from Broadway to 5th St N. The raised street potential for this raised street is to expand Broadway Square as needed for a combined walkable open space as needed for events.



SECOND AVENUE PROPOSED SECTION



Second Avenue Improvements

The goal for the 2nd Avenue project is to build off of existing activities and programs on Broadway and Broadway Square while avoiding conflicts. The concept presents a flexible arrangement with permanent and removable bollards to keep the street functioning at different modes depending on the type and scale of events happening. Kiosks are proposed at certain spots considering the building facades, entrances, and alleyways in coordination with tree planting to provide continuing commercial activity on the street. There is space designated for temporary tents during events such as farmer's markets and street fairs. See the *Fargo Civic Plaza Contextual Planning and Landscape Masterplan, 2019* for more details and scenarios.

9

TAKE ACTION!

Use the Public Art Masterplan to **prioritize public art projects Downtown** and reinforce the "Design District" concept.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Find a lead staff or team to develop design, funding, and implementation plans for public art projects in Downtown. Promote recommendations from the Fargo Public Art Master Plan, which provides clear direction on spaces that are opportunities for public art. Empower those working to create public art to implement projects Downtown.

Where are we now?

Although there is a desire to activate Downtown with public art coming from interest groups, business owners, and others, no institutionalized process to implement public art projects exists. The City's website includes an application form for proposed public art concepts and partnerships, but there is no regular schedule of project funding or formal selection criteria.

There are currently very limited resources to fund and maintain public art across the City of Fargo. The Arts and Culture Commission (ACC) was created in 2016. Currently, $60,000 is allocated for projects and maintenance. This typically supports 1 -2 projects a year. Other allocations for public art — as part of infrastructure projects — occur from time to time. Most projects are secured through public solicitation processes. Currently the bylaws for ACC requires one of the nine board members to be a representative of downtown.

The Arts and Culture Commission is positioned to be the primary advocate for public art citywide, but public art initiatives aren't prioritized with assigned City revenue funding or resource staff.

STEP 1:

Support Fargo's Arts & Culture Commission to evaluate the implementation progress of the Public Art Master Plan.

STEP 2:

Promote public art opportunity locations and constraints.

Confirm 5 priority locations for a public art installation with the Arts and Culture Commission based on the Public Art Master Plan.

Work with City Planning & Engineering to determine specs or constraints for each location, which can be presented with the solicitation for public art.

STEP 3:

Secure ongoing funding to support the implementation of new public art projects Downtown.

Seek to implement the 1% for Art recommendation outlined in the Public Art Master Plan.

STEP 4:

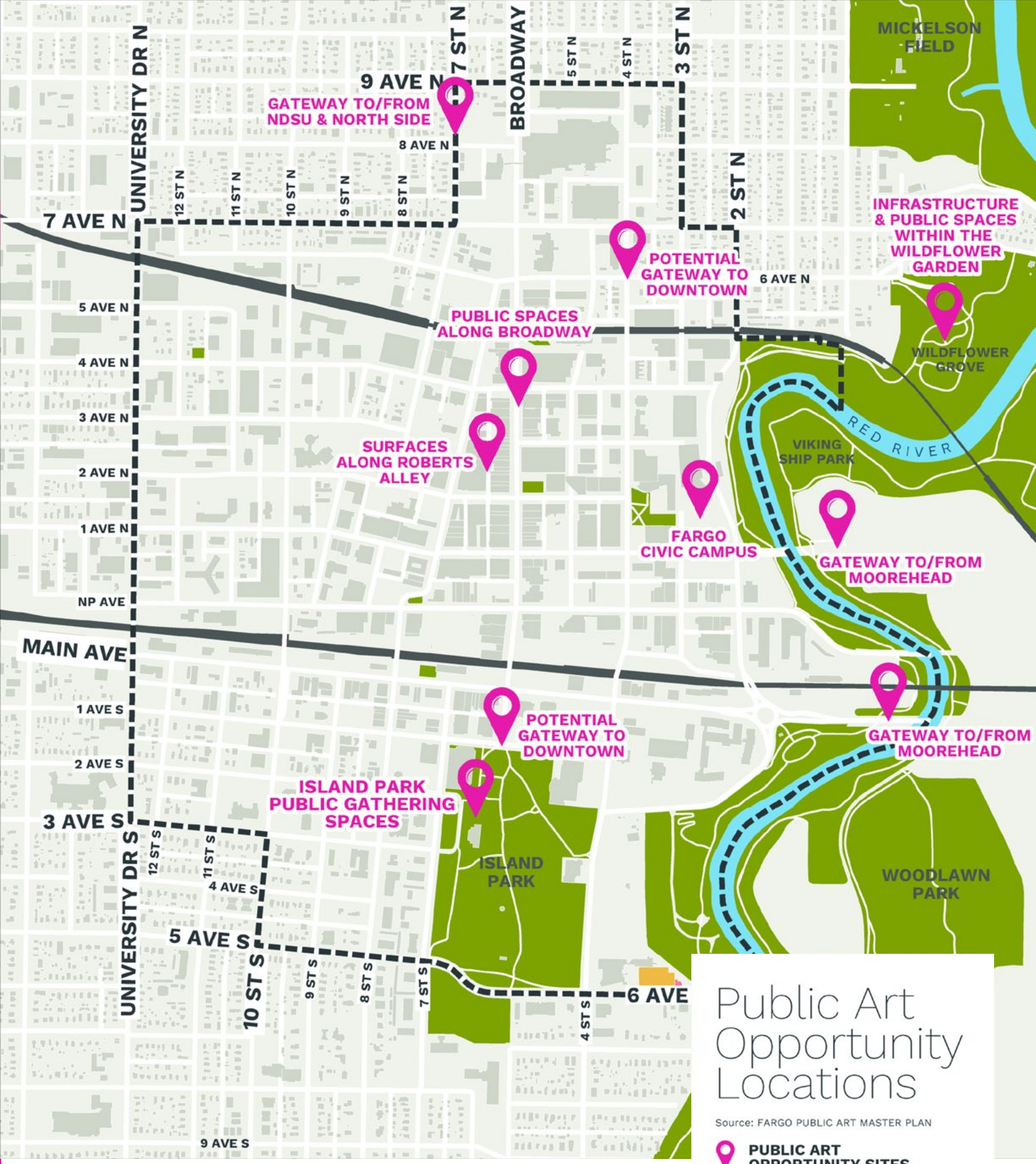
Dedicate funding for the management and maintenance of existing public art projects in Downtown.

STEP 5:

Publicly announce a solicitation and funding for public art in Downtown each year in partnership with the Arts & Culture Commission.

STEP 6:

Consider creating a "Downtown Design District" to help promote and fundraise for new public art as well as market Downtown as the region's destination for design and the arts.



Public Art Priority Locations

The opportunity locations depicted on the map above come from the Fargo Public Art Master Plan.

10 TAKE ACTION!

Commit to the vision for the **Downtown Riverfront.**

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Improved connections between Downtown and the Red River trail, a consensus on what development sites are in play along the Riverfront, and on a general approach to their redevelopment. This established vision will aid in the allocation of funding for implementation. For the property the City controls, new development provides housing at a range of price points and improves the public realm, access to the River, and open spaces. For the properties not owned by the City, clear expectations are set for redevelopment in this area.

Where are we now?

There's not a consensus on the overall vision for Fargo's Riverfront. Red River flood protection is almost complete, and while it is an important piece of infrastructure, it disconnects Downtown from the Red River, both physically and experientially. Few publicly-owned redevelopment sites remain Downtown, most are clustered in the Riverfront area, namely the Civic Center Site, the Mid America Steel Site, and the parking lot at the Southeast corner of the Civic Plaza. A Riverfront TIF district was created, and funds are available to support public improvements in the district boundaries. TIF funds were first used to demolish buildings on the Mid-American Steel site.

STEP 1:

Reach broad agreement on the riverfront plan on this page and the overall timeline for construction.

For Mid America Steel

- Support Phase 2 Environmental Research to determine if residential development is feasible on the site.
- Craft an RFP to realize the recommendations set forth in this document and in accordance with the following principles:
  - » Include a mixed-income housing component if residential development is determined to be feasible (80% AMI, or 100% workforce housing) and if the City agrees to sell the site below market rates.
  - » Leverage new development to provide new open space along the river (on the other side of the proposed flood protection wall)
  - » Be transparent about how RFPs will be evaluated and the proposal scoring and selection process.

For the City Hall Plaza (southeast corner parking lot)

- Work with an architect to undertake a feasibility study on the site's development potential with order of magnitude costs.
- Determine the City's position on the sale of the corner with respect to creating a parking podium for library staff and visitors. This could be developed prior to the sale of the site for the development of its "air rights" over the podium or completed as a public-private partnership.
- This site is also a candidate for mixed-income housing if sold to a developer at below-market rates.

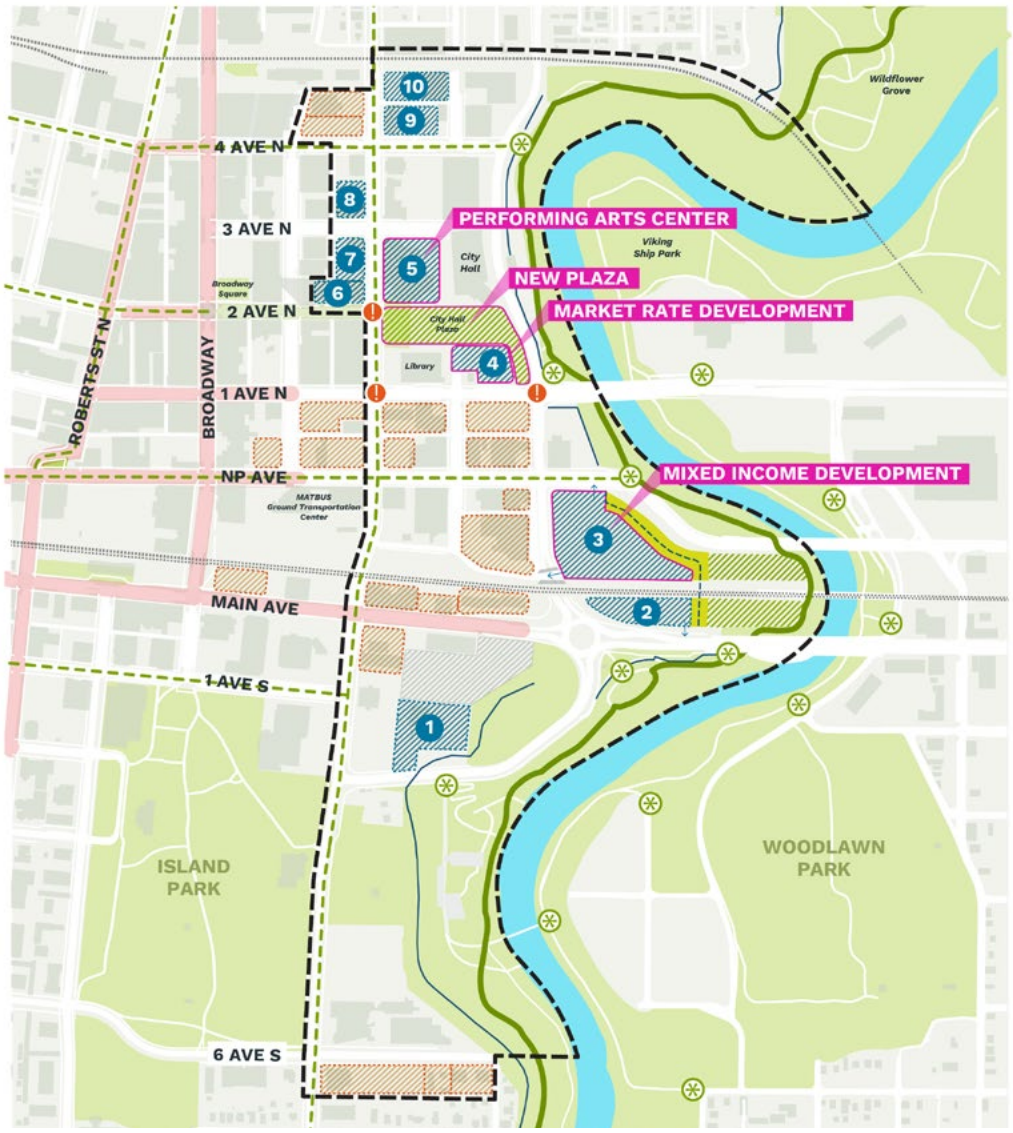
For the Civic Center site

- Establish a fundraising committee to raise dollars for a performing arts center. The fundraising needs to cover both the demolition and development of the facility.

STEP 2:

Provide clarity on where and how Riverfront TIF funds can be spent and what amount is available for investment in the district geography.

If funds are available, prioritize investments in the public realm, including safer crosswalks and more comfortable sidewalks along direct pathways to the Riverfront, capital improvements to City Hall Plaza, and affordable housing gap financing.



Riverfront Plan

Source: Interface Studio

- RIVERFRONT TIF DISTRICT
- FLOOD PROTECTION
- FUTURE FLOOD PROTECTION
- EXISTING BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE
- EXISTING MULTI-MODAL TRAIL
- RIVER TRAIL ACCESS POINT
- EXISTING OPEN SPACE
- PROPOSED OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS
- PROPOSED INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CHANGE

- CATALYST OPPORTUNITY SITES
- PUBLICLY OWNED WITH REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL
  - 1 FHA ~110 SENIOR UNITS PROPOSED
  - 2 MID AMERICA STEEL SOUTH, 1.3 AC
  - 3 MID AMERICA STEEL NORTH, 3.9 AC
  - 4 PARKING DEVELOPMENT SITE
  - 5 PERFORMING ARTS CENTER SITE
  - 6 PARKING GARAGE EXPANSION
  - 7 FORMER POLICE STATION
  - 8 FORMER PUBLIC HEALTH SITE
  - 9 FHA OWNED SITE
  - 10 SCHOOL DISTRICT OWNED SITE
- PRIVATELY OWNED WITH REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL
- CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

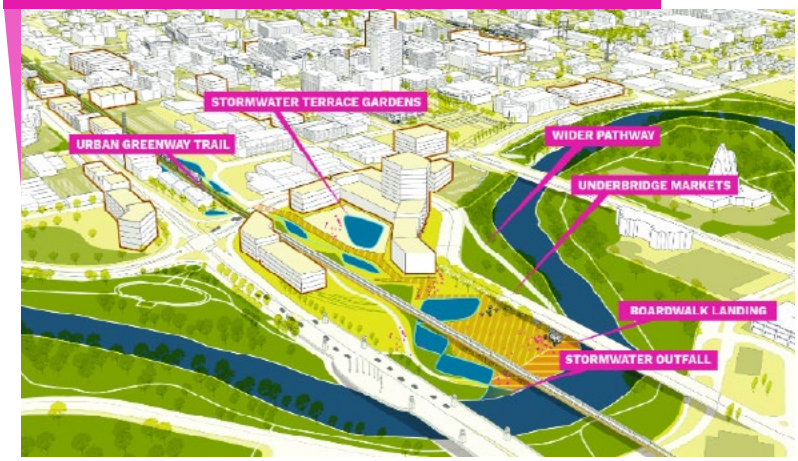
Each of the locations depicted on the map above was vetted by the City of Fargo Planning & Development staff and City Leadership as part of a round of internal stakeholder engagement to create this Plan update and ensure it is reflective of current opportunities.

STEP 3:

Establish metrics to guide future investments

- Measure the amount of new investment, and the number of new residents and users along the Red River and at City Hall Plaza.
- Tap cell phone data (Placer.ai for example) to understand how people travel to the riverfront and where they head before and afterward.
- Publish the results annually and use the data to identify new public investments that further improve the riverfront.

CONCEPTUAL RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT VISION



FARGO INFOCUS (2016): Conceptual sketch of mixed use redevelopment and Riverfront Plaza at former Mid America Steel site.

11

TAKE ACTION!

Improve **City Hall Plaza**

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

A renewed City Hall Plaza that acts as an attractive front door to the City of Fargo, the riverfront, and important destinations like City Hall, the Fargo Library, and a future performing arts center. The plaza is receives temporary improvements in the near term to upgrade the space now for programming and events while planning ahead for a larger overhaul in the spirit of the work completed previously for the space.

Where are we now?

Recent investments in the plaza include a newly constructed City Hall and a new landscape feature that displays the Sodbuster statue. Legacy infrastructure still remains including a leftover asphalt patch that creates a disjointed environment. A new Fargo sign on 4th Street is a location for selfies and occasional programming has occurred in the plaza. The existing pathway to City Hall from the southeast corner parking lot is not ADA accessible and the Plaza overall feels disconnected from both the Red River and Broadway.
A master plan for the plaza was completed in 2019. Since then, a design process for a bridge that connects the space to the Red River trail was conducted. It resulted in a decision to not proceed with a bridge in the near term, though the long-term vision of an active connection between City Hall Plaza and the Red River Trail should remain an important goal.

EXISTING CITY HALL PLAZA

STEP 1:

In the short term, activate City Hall Plaza. A tactical approach should include:

- Finalizing the plan included on the following page. Focus on temporary public art, upgrades to better support programming, clear connections to the Red River Trail, and new trees and landscaping with a focus on supporting local habitats (butterflies). No de-paving is anticipated at this time.
- Target funding for tactical improvements for $100,000/year for the next five years, anticipating maintenance and repainting on an annual basis.

STEP 2:

In the long term, continue to pursue larger reconstruction of the City Hall Plaza as part of a full riverfront build-out, and in accordance with the following principles:

- Provide clear, direct, and welcoming access from 2nd Ave to the entrance of the Red River trail through the plaza itself.
- Explore the creation of a market rate development site on the Southeast corner.
- Design the space to be flexible to easily support Downtown programming, and support peaceful protests by the Fargo community.

Near term enhancement strategy for City Hall Plaza!

ASPHALT MURAL EXAMPLE- "THE OVAL"

Source: "The Oval", Philadelphia, PA.

EVENING ACTIVATION: SOLAR LIGHTS

Solar Pathway Lighting could allow for evening activation.

COLORFUL SAFE CROSSINGS

Painted Curb Extensions, Bayside Park, Jersey City

Inclusive growth

WHAT IS "AFFORDABLE HOUSING"?

Housing is generally considered affordable when housing costs consumes **no more than 30% of a household's gross income**. It's typically applied to those with low or moderate incomes. The concept of affordability is relative and can vary depending on the region, local economic conditions, and individual or family income levels. **The term "Affordable Housing" is often used as a catch-all term and used interchangeably with workforce housing and subsidized housing. Many of these classifications and income limits are dictated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD].**

Household income varies, as does household size, thus, eligibility requirements for state housing assistance programs involve calculating a household's total income as a percentage of the Area Median Income (AMI), as defined by HUD. For example, to qualify for Fargo Housing Authority public housing rentals, a household would need to make less than 80% of the AMI, for a household size of 1 person, their annual income would need to be less than $58,350. Many Downtown service industry workers, for example, would qualify for subsidized housing.

Area Median Income Data Source: U.S. Department of HUD, North Dakota, Fargo MSA 2023 Adjusted Home Income Limit Table

Average Salary Data Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wages in Fargo

WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Over the last 20 years, the City of Fargo has studied the local housing market, neighborhood growth, and affordability across four key plans and studies: *Go2030* (2018), *Downtown InFocus + Housing Memo* (2018), *Core Neighborhoods Plan* (2019), and the *Downtown Affordability Needs Assessment* (2022).
- The 2022 *Downtown Affordability Needs Assessment conducted by* Maxfield Research & Consulting Associates was a comprehensive affordable housing study to assess defined affordable housing needs for Downtown. It recommends for Downtown to provide an additional 250 to 300 rental units of workforce housing (60% to 80% AMI), 150 to 180 units of permanent supportive housing (50% or less AMI) and 150 to 200 units subsidized units (31% to 50% AMI) by the year 2031. In all, that totals 550 - 730 of new affordable rental units to keep pace with demand.
- With the affordability of housing being a top concern for many stakeholders, and limited resources to meet the demand for "subsidized" affordable housing, efforts need to be made to protect the existing naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) in and close to Downtown.
- The City does not develop housing without partners in the private sector. In order to spur new affordable development, the City can establish new development controls requiring private industry to provide affordable units, provide incentives to reduce barriers for developers to do so, or a combination of the two.
- The protection and development of permanent supportive housing is one of few place-based strategies to address homelessness in Fargo. To address homelessness in Fargo, recent plans emphasize a need for the City to increase support for permanent supportive housing. Homelessness has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic across the country and throughout the City of Fargo.
- During the Pandemic, Fargo Cass Public Health opened the Downtown Engagement Center (DEC) in the former police station (222 4th Street N.) to provide emergency isolation and quarantine shelter for single, unaccompanied men and women who did not have permanent housing and were unable to access other shelter facilities. Today, the DEC offers those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness many services including basic needs like laundry, showers, and lockers as well as access to Homeless Health Services. A variety of local organizations conduct outreach weekly at the DEC to better connect with the people we serve.
- Service providers operating at the DEC agree that the former police building does not adequately meet the needs of staff and visitors. A new purpose-built building is needed to provide high-quality care for those in need of housing support services. Exploration into a new location for the DEC is in its infancy.
- Fargo is the largest metropolitan area in the State of North Dakota and Downtown is the largest urban center. Downtown will continue to draw the unhoused population seeking support. For example, the Homeless Health clinic at the DEC is the only one in all of North Dakota.
- Homelessness sometimes gets associated with nuisance activity in downtown, but these should be considered separate issues. Any behaviors that cause nuisance activity should be addressed and do not need to be conflated with the housing status of individuals. The people without shelter are not necessarily the people causing the nuisances.

Downtowns need to serve a diverse population to create an integrated, welcoming place that supports local businesses throughout the year. With the recent growth that Downtown Fargo has experienced, there is a risk of pricing out those that work Downtown like bartenders or cashiers from living there. Further, homelessness is not a symptom but often the result of housing instability. Downtowns across the country have faced rising homelessness and struggle to provide services that will help to alleviate the issues. **Creating an inclusive downtown requires careful planning and investment in housing.**

Here's what we need to do ...

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION ALIGNMENT ACROSS RECENT PLANS

	2018 Go2030	2018 Downtown InFocus + Housing Memo	2019 Core Neighborhoods Plan	2022 Downtown Affordability Needs Assessment
Update the Land Development Code				
Infill gaps between Downtown + Core Neighborhoods	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promote walkability & walkable development	✓	✓	✓	○
Accommodate for a range of affordable housing choices (increase density, smaller unit size)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Development incentives and subsidies to promote affordability				
Expand capital sources to support rehab and revitalization for Naturally Occuring Affordable Housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scattered site program	○	✓	✓	✓
Mixed-income, inclusionary housing requirements for any project withresidential that seeks public assitance	○	✓	✓	○
Create a housing trust fund or community land trust				
Create a regional housing trust fund to support inclusive housing development at a regional level	○	○	✓	○
Create a capital pool, or housing fund, to write down the cost or provide patient equity capital	○	✓	○	○
Use a land trust or shared equity model	○	✓	○	○
Build Permamnent Supportive Housing				
Provide additional shelter beds	○	○	○	✓
Build Affordable Housing ("deep subsidy")				
Focus financial resources on housing products where it is difficult to secure funding	○	○	○	✓
Build LIHTC and Workforce Housing ("shallow subsidy")				
Make better use of 4 percent tax credit	○	✓	○	✓

[1] Fargo Affordable Housing Analysis Findings (Feb 2022), Maxfield Research and Consulting, Study for the City of Fargo.

12

TAKE ACTION!

Explore creating a separate Cass County / Fargo **Continuum of Care.**

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Create a Cass County + Fargo Continuum of Care, separate from the State to focus service administration in the largest metropolitan area in the state. Alternatively, at minimum, work with the state to conduct a sub-level analysis at the County level.

Where are we now?

- The North Dakota Continuum of Care looks at capacity of the homelessness response system and counts the number of individuals experiencing homelessness throughout the state. Data can be broken down by region, county, and city but there are some challenges in ensuring these numbers accurately reflect our cross-border community.
- Recent metrics collected by the ND CoC indicate a surplus of emergency shelter beds across the state. For example, the state CoC boasts an 81% utilization rate of shelter beds, stating that "North Dakota has met its goal for all projects". However, we know that this is not an accurate picture of the state of shelter availability in Fargo, as all shelters are over capacity.
- These statewide metrics make it difficult to lobby for more investment for homeless resources in the City of Fargo, despite the agreement that more resources are needed. For example, according to the FM Coalition to End Homelessness, there are 957 homeless individuals in the FM region, and 8% are unsheltered. However, the 2023 North Dakota point-in-time counts reference 724 homeless persons throughout the entire state. This means there are more people experiencing homelessness in the FM region than in the entire state of North Dakota.

☑ **STEP 1:**
Begin coalition-building among the City of Fargo, Moorhead, and Cass County partners.

☐ **STEP 2:**
Build the County case by using regional data to demonstrate the proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness in Fargo compared to the rest of the state.

☐ **STEP 3:**
Petition the State of North Dakota for additional resources, a County CoC or sub-level study.

☐ **STEP 4:**
Establish a Coordinator and Committee to lead advocacy work at the County level.

WHAT IS A "CONTINUUM OF CARE"?

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning entity designed to coordinate housing, services, and funding for homeless families and individuals. Each CoC member organization is a part of the homelessness response system and maintains a commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. This occurs through the coordination of resources to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation of individuals, families, and communities by homelessness.

Each CoC must establish a board to act on its behalf and must develop a governance charter. The CoC approach is designed to promote community-wide planning and strategic use of resources to address homelessness through the coordinated efforts of assessing and addressing the housing and service needs of individuals and families that are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness. Each year, HUD awards competitive CoC Program funding to carry out CoC program operations.

13

TAKE ACTION!

Develop a 5-year strategy for sustaining the **Downtown Engagement Center.**

What are we trying to accomplish?

The City, County, and State allocate funding for a new location for the Downtown Engagement Center in the Downtown area. A new, improved facility is operational by the end of 2028 (5 years).

Where are we now?

The Downtown Engagement Center (DEC), at 222 4th St. N., offers those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness many services, including basic needs like showers, laundry, and lockers. A variety of providers operate out of the DEC to assist in care coordination and other wrap-around services to promote stability. Service providers operating at the DEC location agree that the building does not adequately support the spectrum of services offered at this location or the functional needs of staff and visitors.

DOWNTOWN ENGAGEMENT CENTER

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- [x] **STEP 1:** **Convene service partners operating out of the Downtown Engagement Center (DEC)** to discuss challenges with the current building and desirable specs and attributes of a future location.
- [ ] **STEP 2:** **Identify potential Downtown properties** able to accommodate a future DEC.
- [ ] **STEP 3:** **Allocate City of Fargo Capital Improvement Program** funding to acquire a property suitable to renovate or construct a new DEC.
- [ ] **STEP 4:** **Close the funding gap** by pursuing state and federal funding needed to purchase, renovate, and open a new facility.

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TAKE ACTION!

Build **mixed-income multi-family** housing Downtown.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

Fund and promote incentives for the construction or rehabilitation of housing units for sale or rent at a broader range of price points Downtown, including more workforce housing for those who make 80% AMI Downtown (for a single person that's currently less than $50,050)

Improve education around available resources and incentives, and increase utilization of the existing HUD 4% LIHTC tax credit program administered by the State for affordable housing as more developers take advantage of existing federal resources.

Where are we now?

- Current affordability incentives are unclear and insufficient to fill the need for affordable housing Downtown.
- Most new housing construction in Downtown is market rate, despite demand for middle-income housing.
- Existing cost to build an affordable unit is $250k - $300k per unit. Although the State administers the 4% LIHTC tax credit program to incentivize affordable housing, this and other potential financing tools are underutilized.
- Not all developers are aware of the program and rebate programs require developers to produce the equity to fund the project up front.
- Adding an additional 550-730 subsidized housing units by 2030, as suggested by the 2021 Affordable Housing Needs Analysis for Downtown Fargo by Maxfield Research & Consulting, would mean to stay on target, Downtown would need to be constructing 80-105 units every year.

STEP 1:

For strategic publicly owned properties, like the redevelopment of MidAmerica Steel, **include an affordability component in the scoring process of the RFP.**

"Affordable housing" in this application would be defined as 80% AMI, or 100% for workforce housing. Mixed-income housing should be the priority; meaning the development should provide a mixture of market rate and affordable units.

STEP 2:

Commit more resources to support mixed-income housing development.

There are many ways to increase resources for affordable housing, including:

1. **Housing PILOT for payment in lieu of taxes** (The City of Fargo already offers this, but the program could be more effective.)
2. **A new approach to TIF management:** Utilize existing TIF funds to capitalize a housing trust fund, funds protected exclusively for use creating or incentivizing affordable housing projects. This would be a different approach to managing TIF for the City of Fargo.
3. **A Housing Bond or form of direct financing:** This would be a new approach for the City but would provide dollars to incentivize new affordable and workforce housing. A housing bond could be used to support the rehabilitation of existing single-family homes to keep them affordable in the core neighborhoods, to provide local dollars to better leverage the use of 4% LIHTC credits and other federal sources of funds, and potentially be used to directly offer rent subsidies to those that qualify. The City would determine the use of the funds should this be an option.

STEP 3:

Actively promote housing development and rehab incentives.

Awareness of existing programs is a critical implementation action. Ensure information related to eligibility and the application process is easy to find and clearly stated. Be sure to include Frequently Asked Questions and a point of contact to assist applicants through the process. Post an expected timeline for review, selection, and funding allocation or reimbursement so developers can clearly understand how the City's process ties into their development timeline.

Inclusionary zoning may help, but it's not a silver bullet for Fargo.

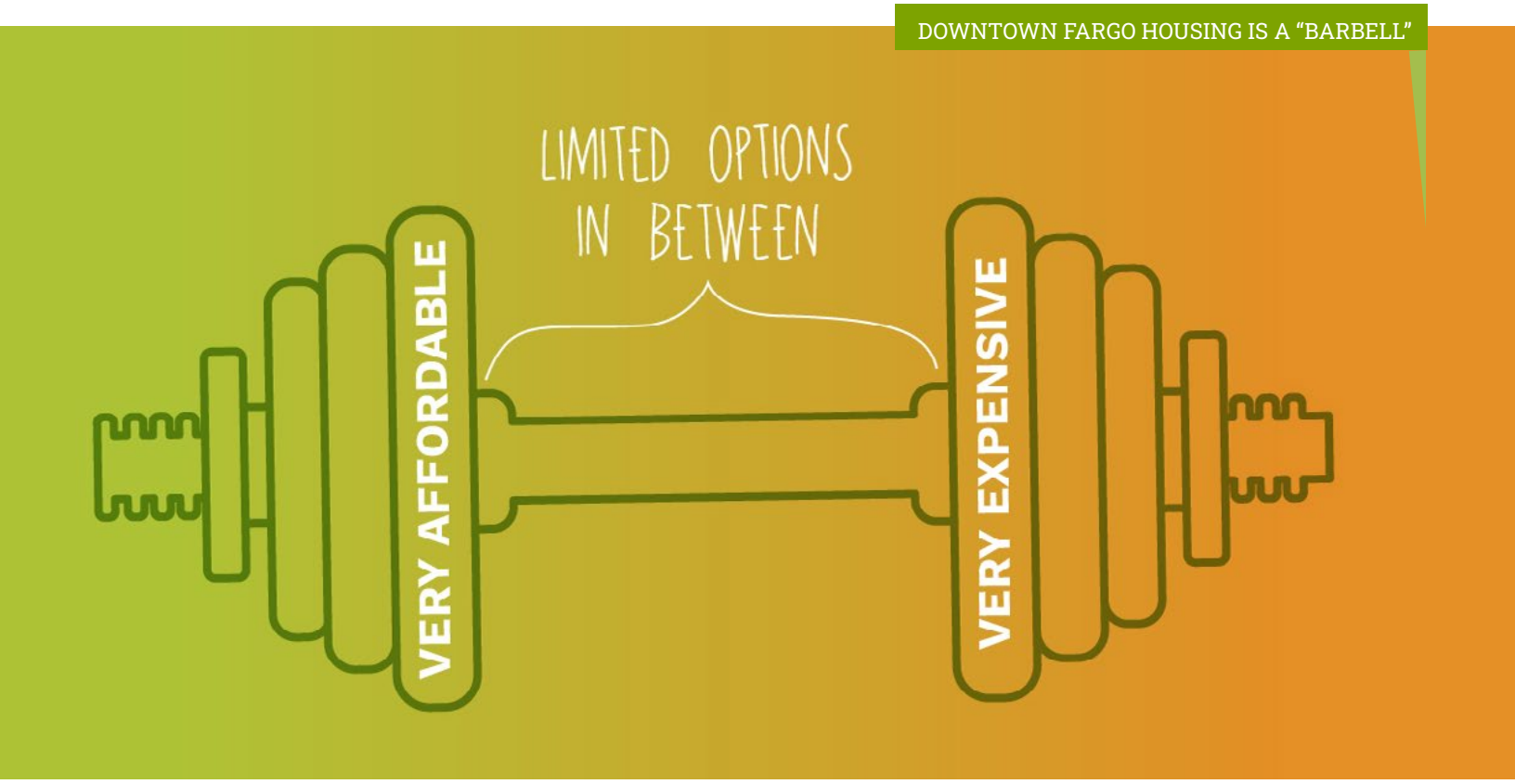
The City's previous plans and studies call out the need for housing for a range of price points. Fargo's current housing is a "barbell"; there are options that are very affordable, very expensive, but limited options in the middle.

Inclusionary zoning is a policy tool designed to promote affordable housing within communities. Under inclusionary zoning, developers are required to set aside a certain percentage of units in a new residential development for affordable housing. These units are sold or rented at below market rates to income-qualified households. The specifics of inclusionary zoning policies can vary significantly from one jurisdiction to another. Local governments tailor their policies based on the unique housing needs, market conditions, and regulatory frameworks of their communities.

Like any policy, it comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Critics argue that inclusionary zoning can lead to an increase in the price of market-rate units, as developers may pass on the costs of providing affordable units to other buyers. Further, inclusionary zoning could potentially lead to a decrease in overall housing supply if developers are less inclined to undertake projects in areas with stringent affordable housing requirements. In addition, the potential impact of this policy is much smaller than affordable housing needs of the City. If the policy were to be implemented here, projections indicate it would only create 80 new middle-income units Downtown over the coming years, assuming the number of new, market-rate units matches the output of the last five years. A recent housing demand study initiated by the City of Fargo estimates that 250 additional subsidized units per year are needed to keep up with demand.

The ultimate goal of Inclusionary Zoning is to ensure that a proportion of new development is affordable and accessible to those who are typically priced out of new development and/or experience barriers to tenancy due to strict regulations on background requirements. The City and other Stakeholders should take considerable action to determine how the goal of Inclusionary Zoning can be met without the negative side-effects on development listed above.

DOWNTOWN FARGO HOUSING IS A "BARBELL"



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TAKE ACTION!

Invest in homes in the core neighborhoods.

What are we trying to accomplish?

Preserve and improve naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) in the core neighborhoods to increase the amount of residents that live close to Downtown.

The City conducts outreach with targeted resources for homeowners who may qualify for existing or upcoming rehabilitation programs.

Where are we now?

The City has begun to capitalize a fund to implement housing revitalization in the Downtown and the Core Neighborhoods. $1 Million per year for the next five years is allocated in the City of Fargo General Fund to provide management and support of these initiatives. Education and coordination across City Departments on the initiative is needed.

The Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative offers low-interest loans up to $100k through Gate City Bank to rehabilitate older homes (40 years or older) that are in need of renovation.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- [ ] **STEP 1:**
Protect existing NOAH multifamily apartments.
The FHA should consider seeking an essential facilities bond concept in pursuit of this goal.

- [ ] **STEP 2:**
Actively promote the Gate City bank rehab program. Awareness of existing programs is a critical implementation action.

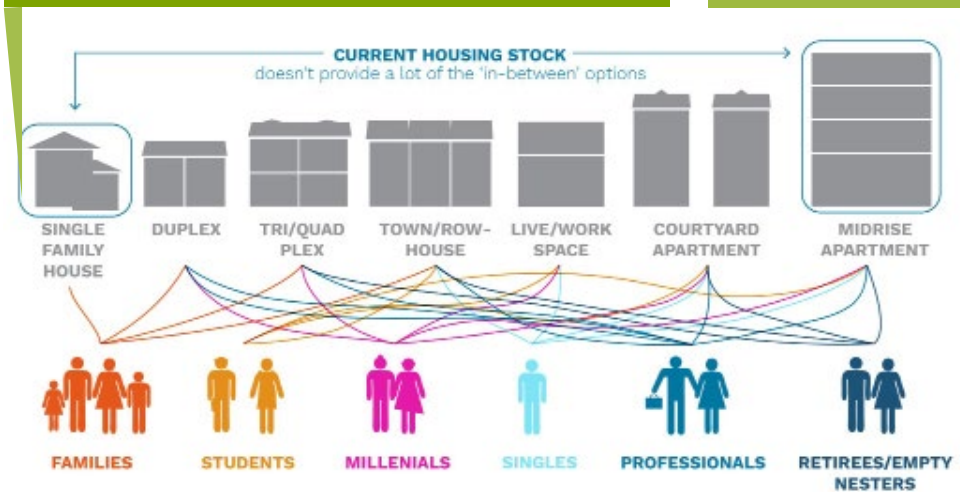
- [ ] **STEP 3:**
Focus on City of Fargo HUD program activities for new housing types or hard to develop properties.
This also ties to City incentives **and other subsidies.**

- [ ] **STEP 4:**
Instill the Core Neighborhood Plan recommendations to minimize further blight by intervening with programs.

- [ ] **STEP 5:**
Participate in the regional housing commission as recommended by the Regional Housing Study and supported by FM MetroCOG.

- [ ] **STEP 6:**
Review City incentives and their use for housing projects

MISSING MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING OPTIONS IN FARGO



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TAKE ACTION!

Pursue **permanent supportive housing** solutions.

What are we trying to accomplish?

New, permanent supportive housing (PSH) modalities to serve those who meet the definition of chronic homelessness and/or have a high need for supportive services to maintain housing stability.

Permanent supportive housing refers to both a housing type and/or a program service type. The ultimate goal of permanent supportive housing is to ensure access to voluntary wrap-around support services are available to those with the highest barriers to housing stability. Most often, people conceptualize PSH as a building with co-located services. However, PSH can also refer to the provision of wrap-around services to those living in scattered-site apartments, which allows an individual more autonomy over their life and connection to the larger community. When these wrap-around services are made available in addition to stable housing, a more costly response to any physical health, mental health, or substance use issue can be avoided or curbed completely. For this reason, it is more cost-effective to provide permanent supportive housing. The City's recently completed housing study recommends 180 units of new permanent supportive housing Downtown with another 120 in the near neighborhoods.

Where are we now?

While Downtown is a focus for services, homelessness shelters and services exist across the Fargo-Moorhead region. There is an extremely limited supply of housing that includes case management and services in the region. There are currently 119 permanent supportive housing units in and near Downtown operating at full capacity.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- [ ] **STEP 1:**
Create a separate Continuum of Care (CoC) committee to provide Fargo metro-specific homelessness data and policy guidance and/or create a subcommittee of the state-level CoC (see Action 12).

- [ ] **STEP 2:**
Pursue community partnerships to proactively address quality of life issues that interfere with the ability to maintain stable housing for those exiting homelessness.
Area medical providers will be a key partner. Work with the state Medicaid agency and managed care entities on a PSH "social determinants of health" model utilize Section 1115 waiver.

- [ ] **STEP 3:**
Dedicate resources to and pursue metro-wide cooperation for the "functional zero" approach to homelessness after Fargo-specific data becomes available.

HOMELESS PERSONS SUPPORT RESOURCES IN DOWNTOWN FARGO

Public financing + economic needs

WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Downtown Fargo is a center for tourism, a driver of tax revenue and business activity, and host to a concentration of resources, amenities, and social infrastructure not found elsewhere in the region.
- The City relies, in part, on funding infrastructure improvements in the City of Fargo through special assessments in the project areas.
- A fundamental rationale of the special assessment structure is to draw funding for improvements from those whose proximity to the project location suggests they will benefit more or more frequently from the improvement.
- Downtown is an economic driver for the region. Downtown Fargo represents the City as a whole, and draws visitors and residents from far outside the urban core to shop, dine, explore, and enjoy all Downtown has to offer.
- Investments in Downtown infrastructure provide benefits to a much larger user group, and as such should be funded accordingly. There needs to be a fundamental shift in how things for Downtown are prioritized and funded.
- There are several large projects under discussion for the City of Fargo, including the expansion of the FargoDome. All could have a positive impact on Fargo, so prioritization is difficult.
- Major investment decisions amplify the impact and impression of Downtown Fargo, broadening the appeal, impact, or desirability as a destination for tourism and business.
- In order to grow as a neighborhood, the Downtown area needs more housing options across a spectrum of affordability levels. The City does not develop housing without partners in private or non-profit development.
- In order to spur new affordable development, the City has two primary options: the "carrot" and the "stick". The City can establish new development controls requiring private industry to provide affordable units OR provide incentives to reduce barriers for developers to do so.
- The Downtown Community Partnership (DCP) - Fargo's downtown organization - and non-profits like Folkways are the primary agents activating Downtown on a regular basis. The DCP estimates that their events and activities bring a total of approximately 150,000+ people to downtown Fargo every year.
- The DCP is 501(c)6 nonprofit, and the primary source of annual operating income is revenue from events (61.25%), member and investor contributions (26.73%), and payment by the City of Fargo to administer the downtown BID (9.05% of our operating budget (2022) - this changed to be a 10% administration fee starting in 2023).
- DCP's ability to expand programming and events is limited by the organization's current funding level and staff capacity.

Downtowns need dedicated funding to reflect the conditions that make downtowns unique. Downtown Fargo is a business center but also an entertainment destination, tourist attraction, and neighborhood. For this reason, Downtown should look and feel differently than other parts of the City as it acts as the region's front door. Creative public investment is needed to ensure we meet Downtown's economic needs. **The City must consider new sources of revenue and project funding structures to ensure our infrastructure, public spaces, and housing can meet the needs of Fargoans today and in the future. And, that our Downtown continues to drive the regional economy and represent the unique cultural epicenter of North Dakota.**

Here's what we need to do ...

17 TAKE ACTION! Increase City **contribution to Downtown Community Partnership** for programming and Downtown Plan implementation

What are we trying to accomplish?

Provide an effective level of resources to support the Downtown as a key revenue-generating location, marketing tool, and talent attractor for Fargo.

Where are we now?

DCP budget is primarily based on membership or assessment fees and revenue from events. DCP has a staff of three and administers the downtown BID with a funding contribution from the City. Without additional funding, the DCP is unable to grow or evolve the current business support actions, programming, or events Downtown.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

☑ **STEP 1:**
Write up a purpose statement and funding request.
Determine how much additional funding is needed and for what purposes.

☑ **STEP 2:**
Submit the request in the 2024 budget cycle.
By early May 2023, requests should be submitted; public budget hearings typically take place in September.

☐ **STEP 3:**
Prepare a Memorandum of Understanding(MOU) that defines the annual contribution by the City and DCP's responsibility to provide services and allocation strategy for funds.

DOWNTOWN ORGANIZATION FUNDING SPENT PER RESIDENT

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TAKE ACTION!

Review and **refine incentive policies** to better achieve public goals.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

A new incentive policy that incorporates the "carrots" for accomplishing the public's goals:

- Provide clear policies and eligibility requirements on public incentives;
- Continue to expand development off Broadway Avenue;
- Provide resources to develop the Civic Plaza, Performing Arts Center, and Mid America Steel sites.

Where are we now?

Fargo has several different incentives that can impact downtown development. These include the Renaissance Zone, New Expanding Business Exemption, Remodeling Exemption Policy, Downtown Housing Pilot, TIF and Public-Private Partnerships. The range of approaches provides flexibility in terms of addressing specific needs but they are also overlapping, or contradictory in value such as the difference between the Downtown Housing PILOT and Core Neighborhood PILOT versus the Housing TIF policy. In other cases such as the Remodeling Exemption Policy, the approaches are only beneficial to the building owner and not the tenants who may be in triple net leases(NNN).

☑ **STEP 1:**
Re-review Tischler Bise Study (2022) on incentives and exemptions

☐ **STEP 2:**
Identify opportunities to include tourism-based businesses in incentives and exemptions given their inclusion as a primary sector.
Review the scoring matrix for continued applicability.

☐ **STEP 3:**
Reconcile tax incentives and exemptions policies between the PILOT programs and the TIF policies.
Particularly in terms of building typologies and the number of eligible years.

☐ **STEP 4:**
Streamline the approach to TIFs clarifying location-based TIF policy versus building typology TIF policies.

☐ **STEP 5:**
Set different objective requirements for TIF incentives where the city may be the issuer of the debt, versus a "pay-as-you-go" strategy.

☐ **STEP 6:**
Look at opportunities for expansion of existing zones
This includes the Renaissance Zone or create new TIFs where properties are underperforming and represent potential opportunities for future development.

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TAKE ACTION!

Redefine RFP process for publicly-owned land and identify terms to evaluate RFPs.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

An agreed-upon development vision that has been vetted by stakeholders is integrated into City RFPs.

Where are we now?

Ideal qualities or vision for development exist in the mind's eye of program administrators but isn't recorded or documented in RFP solicitations or the evaluation process. The City's RFP review process has no institutionalized means to evaluate if the proposal meets this vision.

STEP 1:
Create an RFP Working Group.

Establish a working group of City Staff and Commissioners, and a representative from the Downtown Neighborhood Association and DCP focused on RFP evaluation. This group will help refine the RFP expectation-setting and review process improvements.

STEP 2:
Develop a consistent format for RFP vision-setting to guide RFP development and expectation-setting before public release of any RFP for publicly-owned land.

Response expectations may include details that speak to:

- The project goals or vision drafted by the project administrator and reviewed/confirmed by the RFP Working Group;
- Ideation and/or parameters suggested in past Downtown area plans and studies and relationship to the goals of the Downtown InFocus (2016) plan.
- Project delivery timeline and relevant phasing and/or cost assumptions.
- Siting, circulation, materials, or other design elements that will be used to evaluate proposals received.

STEP 3:
Develop a consistent RFP evaluation scorecard.

Based on elements outlined in the RFP response expectations, a scorecard should be developed by the RFP Working Group and used to evaluate and score all responses.

- The City could use as an example the scoring mechanisms used for new or expanding business exemption incentives.
- Alternatively, the city could use the TIF policy objectives as a starting point to evaluate RFPs. However, as noted previously, not all the TIF objectives are equal in terms of impact so amending them and including a weighting system may be appropriate.

  Coordinating among EDIC, RZ, and CC may be necessary to align initiatives and priorities.

STEP 4:
Reconvene RFP Working Group

All RFP responses should be evaluated by the RFP Working Group against the criteria established in the Response Scorecard.

Development on publicly-owned land can be leveraged to meet some of the Infocus goals mentioned in this document. Opportunity sites such as the Mid-America Steel site is very large, has access to the waterfront, and is along Main Avenue at the entrance to Downtown from Moorhead. The area next to City Hall also has been included in several previous design proposals as an expanded open space.

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TAKE ACTION!

Define a **Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Downtown projects**.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What are we trying to accomplish?

The City has a prioritized list of CIP projects, with a timeline and understanding of where revenue funds are accessed for each. Divide CIP for Downtown Projects into City responsibility and NOT City responsibility.

Where are we now?

No strategic plan exists beyond Downtown InFocus or the TIF Renewal Plan. There is no one at the City dedicated to finding funding and thinking strategically about getting more revenue. Today, grant applications are primarily led by the City Administrator and Directors.

- [x] **STEP 1:**
  Create a list of all Downtown CIP projects under discussion.
  Identify if the project is the responsibility of the City, or not, for every project on the list. Include requests from DCP around specific Downtown improvements

- [ ] **STEP 2:**
  Downtown Coordinator takes the lead.

- [ ] **STEP 3:**
  Review with Engineering and other internal departments.

- [ ] **STEP 4:**
  Review and update the strategic CIP list, annually.

TAKE ACTION!